



# MYSTERIES OF THAILAND

*GREEN PRISON*

By

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BOMBAY  
THACKER & Co., LTD.

First Published 1941 (London)  
First Indian Edition January 1944

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Acc. No.	20072
Class No.	G. H.
Book No.	904

*Set and printed in India by  
R. Bourdon at Western Printers & Publishers' Press,  
15-23, Hamam Street, Fort, Bombay,  
and Published by C. Murphy, Manager,  
Thacker & Co., Ltd., Ramnath Road, Bombay.*

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My thanks are due to the Thailand Legation for permission to use the photo on page 30, and to my friend Mr. W. A. Elder for the frontispiece and photos on pages 62, 184 and 192.



Travelling elephants on the march

# GREEN PRISON

## TWENTY YEARS IN THAILAND

### CHAPTER I.

#### *INTRODUCTION*

TWENTY years in the jungles of Thailand sounds very much like a life sentence. And when most of that time was to be spent in one's own company, it might be said to amount to solitary confinement. Yes, there were occasions during the height of the monsoon, particularly at dusk, when, as I sat in my tent pitched in a small forest clearing, the dripping boles of the trees seemed to close in on me like the bars of a prison. I was a hundred miles—a week's march in that country—from the nearest native town. I was alone, except for half a dozen fever-stricken Kamus. You imagine my hand stealing towards the whisky bottle. And you are right!

But this is only one side of the picture. There are places here in England, destined, I hope, to disappear when our vast programme of reconstruction is in hand, more depressing than a tropical forest in the rains. The drab streets of a strange industrial town on a wet Sunday evening, for instance. While the jungle, though it can be gloomy, can also be bright and happy. It has as many moods as the sea. Take an early morning in the cool weather season. The sunlight streams down through gaps in the foliage above as through the windows of

a vast cathedral. There are flowers of every colour, flaming orchids, giant lilies, wild rhododendrons. The air is fragrant with their scent. There are brilliant birds and incredible butterflies. The forest is alive. There are mysterious scamperings in the undergrowth, and a fleeting glimpse of wild creatures in all the joy of freedom. And there is no one to spoil the scene with irritating phrase or banal comment. It is good to be alive—and alone.

Why did I come to this improbable country, and what am I doing alone in its vast forests? I am in search of teak, *tectona grandis*, apt name for one of the finest species of timber in the world. Some of the best of it comes from Thailand, where my firm holds large concessions from the government.

At the end of four years at Oxford, where I fear I was a member of that very numerous class, the idle poor, I found myself with no qualifications for a job beyond an athletic "Blue" and a thirst for adventure. There seemed no prospects of anything better than becoming an "usher" in some small school. Then, through a friend of the family, I heard of a vacancy in a company working teak forests in Thailand. They wanted a young man with more brawn than brains. And so I got the job.

Four hundred rupees a month, and a travelling allowance of four rupees a day seemed a princely salary. I pictured myself, in a topee and immaculate jodhpurs, riding a mettlesome pony between the ordered ranks of tall teak trees, rapping out orders and acknowledging salaams. Poor fool! Little did I know then that these trees grow an average of a quarter of a mile apart on the slopes of hills so steep that even a wild goat must walk warily. It was to be foot-slogging, my boy! The bloody infantry!

And so, after much preparation and buying of kit, I eventually found myself, in company with an American missionary, a French nun, two Russian ladies of dubious antecedents, and the Portuguese Chargé d'Affaires in Bangkok, ploughing up the Gulf of Siam in a small, cockroach-infested coastal steamer.

On the fourth day after leaving Singapore we were leaning over the rails, observing that indefinable phenomenon known as the loom of the land. All that can be described is that the horizon is at one moment sea, the next land. The distant haze becomes a shadow, the shadow a line of palms. And now the sun picks out the golden spire of a pagoda. We have crossed the bar! We are in the territories of His Majesty King Vajiravudh, Lord of Heaven, Defender of the Buddhist Faith, Prince of the White Elephants (late of Eton and Ch. Ch., Oxon.).

## CHAPTER II

### THAILAND'S BABYLON

WE enter an estuary commanded by the fort of Paknam on our left, where Monsieur Des Farges, Marshal of France, was besieged for two months in 1688, and which caused the French trouble again in 1893. On the right stretch illimitable rice-fields, and as the estuary narrows villages come into view. The houses stand on stilts, and have quaint, high-pitched roofs thatched with attap. Betel and coco-nut palms line the shore. Brown-skinned peasants in queer, mushroom-shaped straw hats and bright clothes are moving about. A group of laughing girls wave us a welcome to their land of mystery and romance. The blue waters of the Gulf have given way to the chocolate-coloured stream of the Menam Chow Phya—the Prince of Rivers.

Bangkok is about fifteen miles up-river. At each bend the banks are more populous and the buildings more substantial. That hideous harbinger of civilisation, corrugated iron, begins to displace the picturesque native huts. The feeling of romance is nearly dead by the time we enter the reach known as the Port of Bangkok. It might almost be the Port of London, for the Menam is alive with modern craft. Steam-tugs and motor-boats of all sizes seem to jostle the native sampans and Chinese junks into obscurity. The whole river is a hive of commercial activity, and everyone seems in a hurry. But the turbulent scene is flanked on one side by the pagodas

of Wat Arun, and on the other by the spires of the Grand Palace. Romance is saved, but it has been a narrow squeak!

Meanwhile, a dapper little Siamese in white topee and drill suit, accompanied by four underlings in a kind of naval uniform, has boarded our ship from a fast launch. These are the Customs officials, smiling and courteous as Customs officials should be, but rarely are. The politeness of the Siamese, I was to find, is ingrained in all classes, and is not a mask, as in the case of some Oriental races. These smiling, friendly people are as scrupulously polite to each other as to strangers. Instances of discourtesy among pure-bred Siamese are extremely rare, and were confined in my experience to "other ranks" in the army.

By now we have drawn alongside a wharf, and tied up. A representative of the firm is there to meet me. He wears a white topee and a well-cut suit of cream-coloured Tussore silk. He succeeds in conveying an impression of some seniority: newcomers must be kept at a distance, they ask too many questions! We enter a two-horse "gharry"—a kind of open victoria drawn by two diminutive native ponies, and driven by a Chinese "sais." Motor-cars were not yet common in Bangkok, and the "gharry" or rickshaw were the usual means of conveyance.

The first noises to be noticed in the capital were the clang and rattle of electric trams, which, I learned with surprise, were running in Bangkok before they had appeared in the streets of Birmingham. This is typical of the inverse progress of Thailand, where the obvious is always struggling to catch up with the unexpected. Telegraphs



preceded railways, and railways preceded roads. In later days, peasants in the more remote provinces who had never seen a railway train or a motor-car were quite accustomed to the sight of 'planes employed on a regular commercial air service! Furthermore, this triumph of modernity caused them no surprise whatever. The reactions of the most primitive jungle villagers to such inventions as the gramophone, the wireless set or the cinema were always the same—pleasure and amusement, but never amazement or curiosity. There was something in their way of living which made such toys superfluous. How often during my time in Thailand was I to wonder if civilisation were worth while!

The Chinese driver whipped up the wretched little ponies, and we galloped along the New Road, which leads up from the wharves to the business quarter. For part of our journey we might have been in Canton—everything and everyone was Chinese. There are large sections of Bangkok where you would rarely see a Siamese, and where Chinese is the only language spoken or understood. The regular influx of southern Chinese into Thailand has been so intensified during the troublous times in China that stringent immigration laws have been framed to check it. But the harm has been done, and the Chinese have something like a stranglehold on the country's commerce. The truth of the matter is that the Siamese, like the Malay and the Burman, is fond of "leisure and the pursuit of happiness," and does not deign to compete with the industrious Chinese, who comes from a country where the struggle for existence is perhaps the fiercest in the world.

My ears were still tingling with the unexpected noise of the city's traffic when another sense was

assailed. This drive was my first introduction to the smells of a native bazaar. The worst of them are traceable to fish in various stages of decay, from sun-dried fillets to a purple sticky mess called "kapi," which is a favourite condiment. This is prepared from fish in the very last processes of dissolution, and smells accordingly. Then there was the smell of chillies and other acrid flavourings, for the ordinary Siamese like their food, mainly fish and rice, very highly seasoned. Practically every meal is some kind of potent curry. As such a diet would doubtless curdle it, the Siamese, unlike the natives of India, are not fond of milk. Their cattle are bred solely for transport and agriculture.

The business quarter contained well-built rows of shops and offices, and most races of the East jostled each other along the crowded pavements. There were natives of India, ranging from the prosperous, bespectacled Parsi merchant to the lean and hawk-nosed Pathan. There were cheerful Burmese, with gay silk headcloth, white jacket, and voluminous "loongyi" over patent-leather shoes. Malays contrived to wear their black velvet fezes with an air of insolent swagger, and Javanese "hajis" were as proud of the golden-bordered turban which proclaimed a pilgrimage to Mecca. Self-confident, secretive Japanese rubbed elbows with Annamites and Cambodians, and a perspiring French missionary priest was conspicuous in broad white topee, black cassock, insanitary beard and elastic-sided boots. How cool by comparison looked his Siamese counterpart, a Buddhist monk holding a white umbrella over his shaven head and clad in a toga-like yellow robe, with raw-hide sandals on his bare feet. The mixture of races, though in a neutral part of Bangkok, was still dominated in numbers by the ubiquitous

Chinese, whose white duck or black silk suits formed a background to the colourful costumes of the rest.

My chief interest was naturally in the Siamese scattered throughout the crowds, but distinguishable by their national "panung." This is an elaborate and elongated form of the primitive loin-clout, and is worn in an almost unlimited variety of bright colours by both sexes. Above it, the majority of the men wear a white drill jacket buttoned up to round the neck, and the women a bodice of cotton or silk. As the women have their hair cropped short, the sexes look alike at a distance, and some old grandmothers might be mistaken for men at a closer view. But there is no room for doubt in the vast majority of cases.

This women's custom of wearing the hair short, which is now almost world-wide, has been in vogue in Thailand for generations, and is said to date from a Burmese war of the sixteenth century. Ayuthia, the ancient capital, was besieged. Sortie after sortie had been repulsed with heavy losses, and the garrison had become so depleted that it was feared the Burmese might realise what small numbers were opposed to them, and order a general assault. So the Siamese women cut short their hair, manned the city's walls and ramparts in male costume, and saved the situation. In honour of their bravery, they were allowed to cut their hair short, and wear the "panung" in perpetuity. This interesting story of how the custom originated is somewhat discounted by the fact that some of the Lao tribes of north-eastern Thailand and Cambodians of Indo-China have the same habit, but may have copied it from their more powerful neighbours. Siamese women of the upper classes are now tending more and more to wear the hair long, like their despised Lao sisters

of the north. Meanwhile, attempts to imitate the current European styles of coiffure are persistent but generally unsuccessful.

Turning right over a small stone bridge, we leave the business quarter and are soon driving down a shady avenue bordered on each side by a "klong" or canal. Bangkok is a network of these semi-tidal waterways, and for this reason has been called "the Venice of the East. These "klongs" are the breeding-places of myriads of mosquitoes, which are the major curse of the capital. From dusk to dawn they make life a misery. A pair of mosquito boots is, or should be, the first purchase of the new arrival in Bangkok. Knee-high and made of canvas, they are the most important article of the evening wardrobe. On more formal occasions or when dining out, the men put on at least two pairs of black silk socks, while the ladies, as they sit down to table, are provided by every thoughtful hostess with a silken sack in which to put their legs, made by sewing up one end of a native "sarong". A bottle of citronella oil is then passed round, to be smeared on bare arms and shoulders. Without these precautions, dinner degenerates into an orgy of scratching and conversation is clogged by curses! There is only one thing to be said in favour of Bangkok's mosquitoes—they are not malarial. Otherwise I am sure the population would have been wiped out long ago, as perhaps happened in the case of the lost city of Angkor, of which more anon.

An ornamental bridge over one of the "klongs" leads us to the iron gates of a spacious "compound." An Indian watchman, in the Company's smart uniform and armed with a stout bamboo "lathi" or stick, salutes us as we draw up in front of a large white building. This is the bachelors' mess of The London

and Bangkok Teak Company, where I am to stay until I start up-country. A smiling Chinese "boy", who speaks his own brand of English shows me up to a large room, in the corner of which a magnified meat-safe contains a bed and small table. This is the last line of defence against the nightly mosquito, and, as I soon learnt, must be entered with haste in order to avoid entertaining a party of visitors, any one of which is capable of decimating the hours of sleep. The room opened on to a broad verandah, which overlooked a garden ablaze with flowers most of which I had never seen before, and surrounded by a wall of hibiscus in full bloom.

This large, cool house accommodated half a dozen of the Bangkok Office and Sawmill staff, and was known in the Company as "The Chummery." I soon discovered that several of its inmates were not on speaking terms! At dinner, served in a large hall, we all sat at a long table in order of seniority. As any junior who spoke "out of turn" was snapped at, it was rather a gloomy meal. But it was a riot compared to breakfast next morning. Everyone sat at his own small table, facing the wall and waited upon by his own Chinese "boy." Conversation would have been an outrage, and anyone who entered with a cheery "Good morning!" would I think, have been shot, so "livery" was "The Chummery" at that hour of the day!

The food was good and the service, under the direction of the white-haired Chinese butler, excellent. All the "boys," many of whom of course were middle-aged, wore spotless white duck suits with high-buttoned collars, and the lower ends of their trouser legs were tucked into white socks and kept in place by a broad band of black elastic silk. No ankle-scratching for them! A pair of black velvet Chinese

shoes with silent rubber soles completed their neat and unobtrusive outfit. These tactful and efficient "boys" are a class by themselves, and mostly come from the island of Hainan in southern China, whence they take service all over the Far East. How many a returned Easterner sighs in vain at home for their quiet industry and incomparable ubiquity! How they spoil their masters for anything but the life of a millionaire! Do you arrive home for dinner from the British Club three-quarters of an hour late and with two or three unexpected guests? It does not matter. There is no fuss, bother, confusion or black looks. The head "boy" merely whispers, "Cook he say please Master give him five more minutes." Time for a round of sherry, and the company sit down to a meal perfect in every respect, with no sign whatever that it is nearly an hour late and was originally prepared for two instead of five!

I was glad to discover that one of the mess was a new-comer like myself, and also destined for up-country. We were not posted to the same station, but were to travel together as far as a place called Raheng, about a week's journey into the interior. Jones was a very nice youth, tall and fair, the product of one of our better schools. He had high ideals and plenty of ambition. He intended to rise to the top of the tree in the shortest possible time, and avoid all the pitfalls of life in the East. A little song, if you like, but no wine or women for him! He and I became great friends while in Bangkok, but our paths diverged up-country, where I only saw him at long intervals. The lack of friendship was one of the trials of up-country life. The men one liked seemed always to be posted in distant districts. On the other hand, should there

be a man, in your own or another firm, whose company you could scarcely endure, the odds were that you and he would be cooped up together in the same small station for years on end!

In the mornings, Jones and I were sent in a launch down-river to the sawmill. It was near the end of the rainy season, and the steamy heat of Bangkok was much intensified under the corrugated iron roofs of the great saw-sheds. We were taught to classify teak logs before they were sawn up, then check our estimates by the actual squares that were produced. It was quite interesting work, but the combination of heat and noise was most trying, and we used to leave the mill at lunch time with a headache. The screech of circular saws, the rattle and hiss of steam cranes, the clanging of the iron chains which dragged the logs from the storage pools up reverberating slipways combined with the shouts of the headmen and the jabbering of the coolies to make pandemonium.

There were acres of storage sheds behind the mill, and many thousands of pounds' worth of timber piled up to their lofty roofs. One evening we went down to dine with the two junior-engineers, who lived in a flat over the Mill Office with a fine view over the river in front, with the timber-yards in flank and rear. By contrast with the daytime's din, an almost ghostly silence enveloped the vast compound, broken only occasionally by the distant blare of a steam-tug on the Menam. In the middle of dinner we heard a blood-curdling cry from 'in front of the office downstairs which was taken up and re-echoed all round the yards and "godowns" until it died away on the edge of the mangrove swamps behind the boundary walls. Jones and I sprang to our feet, thinking some native had been

attacked and was being carried away a prisoner, but our hosts sat rocking with laughter. Then it was explained that these agonising shouts were merely the Indian watchmen calling the hour. There were more than twenty of them scattered about the mill premises, the head watchman being posted under the clock in front of the office. As each hour of darkness struck, it was his duty to call out the time to his nearest neighbour, who passed it on. This chain of calls ensured that all the watchmen were present and awake. Twice more during the evening were we startled by the eerie sound of that high-pitched Hindu cry and the weird echoes that grew fainter in the distance.

Our afternoons were reserved for shopping, sight-seeing, or studying the Siamese language. Siamese belongs to the Chinese family of languages, but its writing is borrowed from southern India. I had a nasty shock when I realised the difficulty of acquiring even a smattering of the language. It is mostly monosyllabic, with a comparatively small vocabulary, but the paucity of words is more than compensated for by there being five "tones." The same word can thus have five different meanings according to the way it is pronounced. There is also a complication of accents which still further increases the range. There is a word in the Lao dialect, spoken up-country, which has twenty-one different meanings! Unless pronunciation is meticulously accurate, one is unintelligible to all but the highly educated. Asking one's way of a jungle villager becomes a nightmare when it is realised that the words "far" and "near" are the same! Here is an example I came across later of the practical difficulties of this annoying tongue.

A friend of mine had set himself a hard morning's inspection in the jungle which would eventually



bringing him out at a certain point on a bullock-cart road. He had an important appointment with a Shan elephant contractor in the afternoon, so he ordered his "sais" and two ponies to meet him at this spot, which was about six miles from his camp, at midday. It was the hot weather, and he had had a gruelling time climbing up and down hills. At last he emerged on to the cart-road, relieved at the thought of a gallop back to camp, then a bathe and lunch. Imagine his feelings when he found, at the appointed spot, his dog-boy sitting under a tree with two panting terriers! The words for dog and horse are the same, and as he sweated back to camp along that dusty cart-road he swore a mighty oath never to mispronounce "mah" again!

It has been said that Englishmen are bad at European but good at Oriental languages. Siamese goes far to explode this theory, for it proved far too difficult for the average Englishman. Up-country the standard was deplorably low, and many a man who had been out twenty years was unable, in spite of a "sleeping dictionary," to give clear and precise orders or understand half what was said to him. Foreigners were, as a rule, better at the language than we were, but the number of Europeans in the country who could speak Siamese really well might be counted on the fingers of one hand. In addition to the vernacular, there is a polite or court language used in royal and highly educated society, whose intricate embroideries and niceties of nuance provide still further pitfalls for the unwary. A studious friend of mine mixed the two languages up when ordering his Kamu (coolie) cook to kill a chicken for dinner. His astonished staff gaped at something which might be roughly (very roughly!) translated thus: "It is our command that the feathered friend

shall receive euthanasia in preparation for our banquet."

Jones and I waded into the Siamese grammar, and later found the long journey up-country an excellent opportunity for study and practice. I "swotted" up the language chiefly because I had nothing else left to read. It was not many months before I was interpreting for my seniors, and had gained a reputation for being good at the language, chiefly because I could write it with speed and tolerable accuracy. This does not mean that I was at all a Siamese scholar, but merely that I shone by comparison with the average "jungle-wallah," whose "howlers" were a perpetual delight to the local inhabitants. Yet the Siamese were marvellous at keeping a straight face whenever the white man had recourse to a useful and necessary word which can very easily be mispronounced to denote an equally useful and even more necessary natural function!

One afternoon we were taken round to visit some of the more famous temples or "wats" of Bangkok. We marvelled at the Emerald Buddha, a poem in green jade, whose chapel is flanked by guardian monsters with gigantic swords, and the beautiful gallery of Buddhist images in Wat Benchamabopitr. This trip restored the feeling of romance which had wilted in the bustle of the mill and the bickering of "The Chummery." Siamese architecture, branching away from austere Chinese convention, has developed a delicate and ethereal beauty all its own. The temples typify the brightness and gaiety of the national temperament. Tiled roofs in vivid colours are super-imposed one over the other, their cornices ornamented with a golden-crested "naga," or sacred serpent, which replaces the dragon *motif* of China. Broad-based pagodas, heavily encrusted with gold-

leaf, taper upwards into infinity. Sculptured doorways and carved façades relieve the dazzling whiteness of the temple walls.

In most Siamese temples the central shrine, or "viharn," is flanked by smaller chapels, and the whole courtyard surrounded by cloisters. There are few windows in the "viharn," and its "dim, religious light" is a relief from the glare outside. At the far end a giant statue of Buddha, seated with the soles of the feet upwards on the coils of the "naga," smiles benignly down. Beneath him is an altar decorated with flowers and surmounted by a seven-branched candlestick. To his right is a small pulpit, beautifully carved and inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Long prayer-streamers hang down from the lofty roof, which is supported by pillars of gilded teakwood. The walls are painted with incidents in the Master's life, or pictures of the joys of Nirvana and the tortures of the damned. In front of the altar a few yellow-robed priests are chanting prayers in the ancient Pali with a high intonation that echoes queerly round the shadowed roof. Here, as truly as in its counterpart in Christendom, is found detachment, serenity, peace.

After the temples, the palaces, which indeed follow the same architectural design. The exception is the Ananta Smakom Palace, copied from St. Peter's, Rome. It lies in the royal residential quarter, where later I witnessed a curious scene. With a friend, I was motoring down a shady avenue bordered by a broad grass verge. About twenty yards ahead of us, and going in the same direction, was a large saloon car which proved to contain two Princesses of the Blood. Coming in the opposite direction was an empty passenger coach, with only the uniformed driver in charge. As he approached and recognised

the royal car, he swerved his 'bus on to the grass verge, at the same time raising both hands in the Siamese "salaam," which is the same as our attitude of prayer. Not even their own half of the road was good enough for the heaven-born! Unfortunately (and I say this advisedly) this spirit is fast disappearing from modern Thailand. It is succeeded by the worship of a "scrap of paper" known as The Constitution.

Other afternoons were spent buying kit and provisions in a large emporium known as "The Oriental Stores." This concern was run by the Danish "East Asiatic Company," which has branches all over the world and runs its own fleet of motor-driven passenger and cargo vessels. Its origin was in a small ship-chandler's store on the banks of the Menam, owned by a Dane named Andersen, who died a millionaire not long ago. This company is, in a way, the Danish equivalent of our old East India Company, and in those days Bangkok was, commercially, almost a Danish colony. An adventurous young Dane turned as naturally to Thailand as our forefathers to India. In addition to this big company, most of the public utility services in Bangkok were run by Danes, including tramways, river transport, and electric lighting. At that time, too, all the executive posts in the Royal Siamese Provincial Gendarmerie were held by Danes, and a Danish ex-army officer was Director-General of this corps. Many an anecdote illustrates the forceful personality of old General Schau. The Provincial Gendarmerie certainly does credit to its early training under Danish officers.

In the evenings there was a fair choice of recreations for the foreign residents of Bangkok, but there was a definite time-limit for games. Office or the

heat delayed the start to well after four in the afternoon, and it was dark, practically all the year round, at half-past six. At the Royal Bangkok Sports Club there was a race-course, "rugger" field, tennis and "squash" courts and an eighteen-hole golf-course. The hazards on the latter were the inevitable "klongs," so we played with floating balls. Heaven knows how many of these wretched water-ways intersected the course! They were generally invisible from the tee. One would drive off quite fairly to one's satisfaction, and the little Siamese caddie, in uniform of red shirt and white shorts, would murmur, "Tok nam." "What's that mean? Good shot?" I asked my companion on my first round.

"No, it means you've driven into a 'klong'—penalty, one stroke!"

Then we would walk up to the small but deep canal in which my ball was drifting lazily and the caddie would strip and swim out to retrieve it, quite enjoying the cool bathe on a sultry evening. The next shot found the "klong" guarding the green! Though in later years I played a lot on this course, I could never get the position of the "klongs" fixed in my mind. If by any chance I did remember where one was, I found the water a much stronger attraction than the most hungrily yawning bunker on a home course. In Bangkok golfing circles this state of mind is known as hydrophobia!

After a round of golf or a game of tennis, a cooling drink was generally indicated. The crowd that thronged the small tables on the lawn in front of the clubhouse was as cosmopolitan, if not as large, as one would find in Cairo or Shanghai. Nearly every country in Europe was represented, as well as

the U. S. A. The foreign community in Bangkok on the whole mixed very well together. There was sometimes a little friction between the younger Danes and Britishers, which would lead to an occasional brawl late at night in some less respectable Russian "hotel." But at the Sports Club the atmosphere was very friendly. Many of the Siamese aristocracy and higher officials were members, and some of these could give the foreigner points at tennis or even at "rugger." At "soccer" the Siamese, in spite of our having an Oxford and a Cambridge "Blue" in the European side, almost invariably beat us.

A more formal resort was the British Club, mostly composed of the consular body, British advisers in the various Ministries, and "burra-sahibs" or heads of business firms. The atmosphere reminded one faintly of that at "The Chummery" in that juniors were expected to hold their tongues in the presence of their betters. As to our consular staff in Thailand, I was not alone in regarding them as being a little affected with pomposity. They were apt to assume the airs and graces of the Diplomatic Service, a slight superiority, a hint of hauteur, a tendency to forget that, after all, they were merely there for our service and not for our social leadership. I well remember on one occasion, when I was rushed away on short leave, and had only a bare half-day in Bangkok for shopping, getting tickets and letters of credit, renewing passport and the like, how one of these junior consuls kept me waiting for half an hour in his private office while he chatted affably about nothing at all with an Indian merchant, completely ignoring me as I sat and twiddled my impatient thumbs. This pomposity increased in direct ratio to their distance from Bangkok, and a consular officer on tour in the jungle was a sight for the gods. It

is only fair to say that the real diplomats—H. B. M.'s Envoys Extraordinary and Ministers Plenipotentiary to the Court of Thailand—were excellent fellows and good mixers, with a sense of humour sadly lacking in their junior staff.

The progressive decline of British prestige in India and the Far East during the present century is due to a variety of causes, some of them international, but many shrewd observers find a contributory factor in the filling of posts in the Indian Civil and Consular Services by competitive examination rather than by "scientific selection." It has been said of the French that they keep all their best men at home, and send only second-rate material abroad. I am not at all sure the same is not true of ourselves. Unfortunately, the spirit of adventure is not so rife with us as it used to be, and the average young man has such an easy life at home that it is difficult to find the right brand for export.

Less stereotyped than the consular corps were the various British advisers to the Siamese Government. Some of these had been lent from India or the Federated Malay States, and many specially recruited from home. Most of these advisers had interesting jobs and were not averse to talking about them. Their efforts for the country's progress were, naturally, sometimes held up by red tape or reactionary vested interests. The gossip of the Ministries, with an occasional spice of scandal, was most entertaining, and, as I got to know it better, I found the British Club a useful place in which to satisfy my thirst for information.

It was here one evening I listened to an adviser to one of the Ministries relating a recent experience of his while travelling on the new railway to the

south, which had not yet linked up with the F.M.S. lines. In a third-class compartment a Siamese woman was holding her baby out of the window for a certain purpose when she dropped it. She rushed frantically up and down the corridor until she met a ticket-inspector outside the Englishman's compartment.

"Stop the train! I've dropped my baby on the line," she shrieked.

The Siamese inspector took from his pocket a bulky volume of railway regulations, and commenced to read through it.

"Quick! Quick! For pity's sake stop the train!" wailed the distracted mother.

"I'm sorry," said the inspector at long last, "but I cannot find anything in the regulations about dropping babies out of trains."

Here the Englishman interposed, and persuaded the inspector to pull the communication cord. The train stopped for an instant, and as the inspector flagged it on again, the wretched woman could be seen running down the track, between the walls of tigerinfested jungle, until a bend in the line hid her from sight. The inspector shook his head sadly as he walked up the corridor.

"I'm afraid I shall get reprimanded for this, the train is ten minutes late already."

The days passed, and we were soon due to leave for up-country, just as we were beginning to find our way about this straggling city. Even in those days the population must have been about eight hundred thousand, while it is now well over the million mark. In comparison with the rest of the country, this is a very high proportion. Bangkok in



fact dominates and dwarfs the rest of Thailand, and monopolises the amenities of civilisation. Small wonder that the Bangkok Siamese is never really happy elsewhere. However high and lucrative his provincial post, he considers himself as much an exile as a Parisian out of Paris. What must he think of us Englishmen who spend nearly all our time in the jungle!

On the eve of our departure, a member of "The Chummery" volunteered to show us the night life of Bangkok. We first dined uncommonly well at the old original Oriental Hotel, which was the only one of repute in the Bangkok of those days. It was late by the time we had piled ourselves into a two-horse "gharry," and were driving through the crowded bazaar. We stopped at a booth in the Sampeng quarter to watch an exhibition of fighting fish. These small creatures when swimming about in their own glass bowl were not in any way remarkable. But when a bowl containing another fish was placed alongside, an amazing transformation occurred. Crests, bristles, spikes and fins that had previously been invisible rose on end, and the small fish had doubled in size and was positively pulsating with pugnacity as he bumped against the side of the bowl in an effort to get at his hated rival. And when the two little furies were put into the same tank together, there ensued a fight to the death, on the result of which the native audience wagered freely.

We were next taken to see some Siamese boxing, a traditional sport which allows the use of the feet. There is a lot of posturing and dancing as the combatants circle round each other. Their fists are thinly bound round with cloth, and we expect to see some bloodshed. But we are not prepared for the astonishing agility with which one of them leaps

high in the air and delivers an upper-cut to the jaw with his left foot! It seems to be the etiquette that an exchange of blows should be followed by more posturing and dancing. A white-coated official is refereeing at the ringside, and the end of each short round is proclaimed by a gong. One lad's face is now bleeding freely and he tries to keep out of reach. His opponent is shortly pronounced the victor on points, and signalises his triumph by leaping in the air and dancing all round the ring, to the "chai-yohs" (hurrahs) of his supporters.

We next drove on to a Russian "hotel" on the fringe of the residential quarter. An Indian watchman opened a door in a wooden fence in response to our knocks, and conducted us up a flight of stairs, along a passage, and into a large room. The centre of the floor was cleared for dancing, and around the walls were small tables and an occasional plush settee. Some large and "blowsy" Russian women lolled about, and a couple of lugubrious Scandinavian supercargoes sipped drinks at opposite ends of the room. An ancient gramophone ground out some forgotten dance tune. Our entry caused something like a sensation. We sat down at one of the tables, and very soon two of the "girls" (they must have been nearly forty) came across the floor to join us. They suggested champagne, but we told them it would be bad for their figures, and ordered whiskies-and-sodas all round. The impassive face of the Chinese "boy" who brought the drinks somehow contrived to register contempt of his employers. We did not stay long, and left the two Danes or Norwegians to their fate.

Our next port of call was a Siamese brothel. A substantially built native house was reached through a door in a high bamboo fence. The house was

roofed with teak shingles and raised on piles. We climbed up a steep wooden staircase on to a broad verandah lighted by a single kerosene lamp. The sole occupants were a toothless old woman who puffed at a green cheroot and took an occasional pull at a bottle of "Beehive" brandy, and a small boy. The small boy dashed out as we arrived, and the old dame invited us to squat on some grass mats on the floor. In about ten minutes the youngster returned with three Siamese girls. They had regular features and almond eyes, and their faces were slightly powdered to please the "farang" (European). They were obviously young, and none of them was over five feet in height. Their figures were well developed, and they were dressed in cotton bodices and silk "panungs" of the gayest colours. One of them had thick silver anklets, and they were all heavily perfumed with bazaar French scent. They stood on the verandah pretending to be coy, then started to laugh and chatter. Jones and I, of course, could not understand a word, but the other man gave them each a silver coin, and they started to dance.

Dancing is the natural Siamese expression of every emotion from fear to joy. I have seen a boatman cavorting on the prow of his canoe before shooting a dangerous rapid. The public executioner indulges in a "dance of death" before cutting off his victim's head. Every child of three can dance quite well, and these girls were experts. As proof of this, the other man pointed out, when they bent back their hands, their finger-nails almost touched the forearm just above the wrist. Siamese dancing is mime and gesture rather than foot movement and more is expressed by the arms and hands than by any other part of the body. There is nothing

suggestive, as in the dance of the Hawaiian "hula-hula" girls, or the belly-dancers of Egypt. But in this Siamese dancing was grace and rhythm, the very "poetry of motion." Their arms weaved snake-like patterns in the air, while their bodies swayed to and fro, and their bare feet beat time on the floor. The old woman and the small boy crooned an accompaniment. The girls obviously enjoyed the dance, and smiled at each other and at us. Here at last, I felt, was the real East tawdry, barbaric and yet fascinating. When they had finished, we gave them each another "tical" and prepared to go. At the head of the stairs Jones, the impeccable Jones, dashed back and, picking one of the girls up in his arms, kissed her passionately, brutally. She squealed with delight. He rushed down the stairs after us, and I wondered, was it a good thing or a bad thing for him we were leaving for up-country next day?

## CHAPTER III

### UP THE MENAM

YOU go up-country nowadays in your private cabin on a train which has shower-baths and a well-staffed restaurant car, and is drawn by the latest type of Diesel-electric engine. The journey from Bangkok to Chiangmai, "the Northern Capital," takes a trifle under twenty-four hours. But at the time of my first trip the river was the only practicable route, and the journey took six weeks! The Northern Railway had barely got beyond the central plain of Thailand, and was being laboriously tunnelled through the foothills of the main ranges under the supervision of German engineers. The Southern Railway was being built by Englishmen and financed by a loan from the Government of the Federated Malay States. These railway contracts were but one example of the Siamese policy of "appeasement"—to distribute favours among as many nations as possible.

The Menam Chow Phya divides into two at Paknambo, and its Meping branch into two more at Raheng, three hundred miles north of Bangkok, where the Company had a rafting station and two teak forests. Raheng can be reached by shallow-draught launches in the rainy season, and an old stern-wheeler called the *Bua Deng* ("Pink Lotus") had been chartered to take Jones and myself on this first stage of the journey. At Raheng we were to tranship into native poling-boats, Jones to continue

up the Meping as far as Chiangmai, while I was to follow the Mewung branch up to Lakon Lampang. Both rivers pierced the main mountain barrier in a series of wild gorges and foaming cataracts which at all water-levels form a stiff test of the skill and courage of the Lao boatmen.

Our journey was overshadowed by another responsibility. We were each to take up with us a hundred thousand silver rupees! In those days there were no banks up-country, and paper money was almost unknown. The jungle villagers had no use for currency notes. You can't bury them, and when you have to swim a river they get wet and are worthless. So the teak firms financed their forests with Indian rupees, which almost entirely displaced the Siamese silver "tical," of approximately the same value, in the bazaars of the north. The specie was covered in transit by the British insurance companies on the express condition of "armed European escort." Advantage was taken of any white assistant leaving Bangkok for the north to send up rupees in bulk. New men were always preferred as "escort" because they were more likely to take a serious view of their first responsibilities. You could trust them to "sit on the money-bags!"

Jones and I were issued with revolvers and instructed to keep them loaded in our belts all day, and sleep with them under our pillows at night. A short time before an Englishman had been shot dead as he sat in front of his tent one evening, and all for the sake of a paltry two or three thousand rupees. Here were we saddled with a trifle of about £6,700 each! And the countryside, at any rate as far as Raheng, was infested with roving bands of dacoits who preyed on the river traffic! This was certainly not going to be a pleasure cruise.

Instead of a propeller, the *Bua Deng* had a large paddle at the stern. She was steamdriven, had a funnel amid-ships, and was supposed to draw only three feet of water. The "serang" or captain was an old Malay called Ibrahim, and the crew of five were his sons and sons-in-law. They were a villainous-looking lot, of Dyak blood, and some of them wore daggers in their belts. It occurred to me (and, as he afterwards, confessed, to Jones too) that our own crew were as likely as anyone else to take the first opportunity of doing away with us and getting away with the specie!

The *Bua Deng* was tied up at the landing-stage of the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China. Jones and I, the firm's accountant, and a man from the Bank, assisted by half a dozen Sikh watchmen with heavy bamboo "lathis," superintended and checked the transference of the specie from the Bank's vaults to the strong-room of the *Bua Deng*. Half-naked Chinese coolies padded up the concrete slope from the vaults each with two boxes containing one thousand rupees apiece slung from the ends of his bamboo carrying-pole. The boxes were bound round at each end with strips of metal, and sealed with the Bank's seal. Attached to each box was a coil of thin rope ending in a bamboo float. This, we were told, was to mark their position in the river-bed if we were wrecked in the rapids or sunk by a broken-up teak raft! When the specie was all loaded into the strong-room, our accountant locked the iron door and strapped the key to my wrist. Then we left the Sikh watchmen on board, and retired to the Bank's spacious mess-room for a farewell gin-sling.

It was near the end of the rainy season, but we were expecting to make Raheng inside a week. The

*Bua Deng* had two cabins and a bathroom, as well as the strong-room, in the hold, and quite a roomy upper deck. It was near midday when we finally got off, and the heat in the cabins was unbearable. We soon decided that, however good a target we made on the top deck, it was there we would spend our time. So we changed from our white duck suits, last link with social life, into cotton singlets and silk Chinese trousers, and made ourselves comfortable in long cane chairs.

The *Bua Deng* was threading her way through junks and sampans into mid-river. On the west bank rise the towers of Wat Arun, modelled on the famous temple of Angkor. On the right we pass the enclosure of the Grand Palace, and can see soldiers drilling on the green lawns. A destroyer lies at her berth in the channel. She looks as if she needs a coat of paint. Her crew wear a naval uniform, but it is khaki in colour. Their washing hangs out to dry amidships. In those days the Siamese Navy did not often go to sea, but they have changed all that. We have now reached the west-bank suburb known as "Little Bangkok," terminus of the Southern Railway. Huge rice-mills built of corrugated iron deface the river banks. In front of the mills fleets of paddy-boats are being unloaded by strapping Chinese coolies, who balance huge baskets of paddy on the back of their necks. In course of time the basket raises a lump behind the neck, a hard swelling which lasts for life. Both in Thailand and in Malaya, many a wealthy Chinese merchant betrays his humble beginnings as a rice coolie by a tell-tale callosity which no collar will hide.

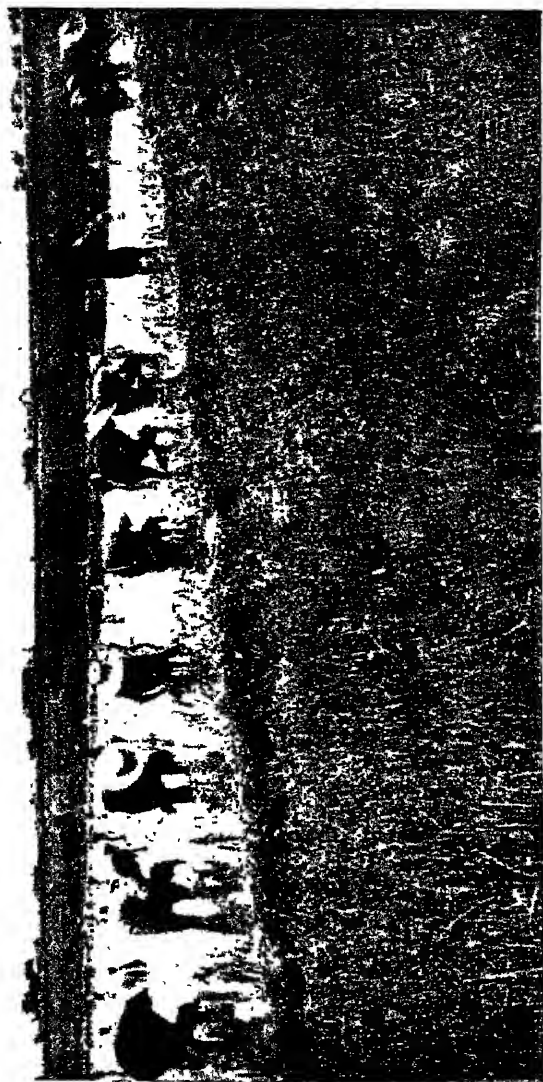
Most of Thailand's flourishing rice trade is in Chinese hands, and practically all the mills are owned



by Chinese. They are heavily insured with European firms. In a slump year, when the mill is glutted with thousands of sacks of paddy which no one will buy, the owner generally arranges a fire. The whole place is sprayed with kerosene, and the night-watchman instructed to apply the necessary spark. Sometimes he bungles the business so badly that the insurance companies get suspicious and refuse to pay. The resulting court case makes most amusing reading!

At last the capital is left behind. We are in the centre of a vast rice-plain. The landscape is dotted with watch huts built on stilts. Occasional clumps of mango trees or groves of bananas shelter a farmstead, where corralled water-buffaloes are chewing the cud. Though only a few hours out of Bangkok, we are in the heart of agricultural Thailand, the great central rice granary which not only supports the population but is carried all over the world. The very smells are different. The fetid stench of the bazaars have given way to a kind of primitive rustic inhalation compounded of damp earth, cowdung, wood fires and the musk-like odour of the ripening crops. How often were one's memories of different parts of the country to be recalled by the sense of smell! In the same way, the domestic memories of home leave could be brought back by some cherished gramophone record of the season's dance tune.

The river narrows from a quarter of a mile to less than a hundred yards as its two arms enclose an island village. It is dusk, and everyone is enjoying the evening bathe. The children splash about naked in the shallows, the men and old women are bare above the waist. But the older girls and young women are careful not to expose their charms, fastening their long "panung" at the waist, they



" We are in the centre of a vast rice plain "



draw it up round their shoulders while they slip off their bodices. Then, the "panung" knotted under their armpits, they go down into the water and bathe with it on. On coming out, a dry "panung" is put on over the wet one, which is slipped down to the feet, and modesty has won the day at the expense of comfort.

As the *Bua Deng* passes, the bank is lined with children. We catch the word "farang" (foreigner) which is to be our label for many a long year. But the tone is friendly. There is nothing of the "foreign devil" attitude of the southern Chinese, who are the rudest people in the world.

The river has broadened out again, and the "serang" is looking for an anchorage. He has instructions not to tie up to the bank in case of dacoits, and is trying to find a submerged sandbar in midstream. At last he is satisfied, and slows up, while two of the crew have the anchor off the bows. It holds, and we swing gently to the current. Darkness has come on us suddenly, and we call for a lamp, and drink.

The cabins were still stuffy, so we decided to sleep on the top deck. I think we felt safer the farther away we were from the crew. The banks were lined with elephant grass, which is a kind of reed about ten feet high. Amongst it, fireflies were weaving fantastic patterns until the moon rose and dimmed their dance. But the night was not to pass without a shock. We were suddenly awakened by the most horrifying howls, which rose to a crescendo, died away, then started all over again. "Panthers," said Jones, and, knowing no better, I believed him. What a mercy we were in midstream! Later on I discovered that panthers do not live in these places, and that their cry is a kind of sootling cough.

What had alarmed us was one of the commonest night sounds of the country—village pariahs baying the moon!

Next day we passed through the old capital, Ayuthia, which was deserted after being sacked by Burmese invader, in 1767. Phya Tak, one of Thailand's national heroes, collected the scattered remnants of the defeated army, and retreated down-river to the site of the present capital. Having reorganised his forces and driven out the Burmese, he decided not to rebuild Ayuthia, but instead founded a new capital at Bang Makok, which later became abbreviated to Bangkok. In course of time Ayuthia became repopulated as the centre of a province, but the only traces of its former importance lie in the ruined temples, crumbling pagodas and its Siamese name of Krung Kao (Old Capital). From the river we could see a few of its broken pagodas with weeds and even bushes sprouting from their scarred sides. Their golden spires had long since been melted down to make bracelets for the harem of Hsinbyushin. It was not difficult to visualise those barbaric invaders streaming across the broad plain, their armour flashing in the sun, their trumpets blaring and their plumed spears waving as they marched behind the armoured war-elephants who had battered their way through the defending armies and were closing in on the doomed city.

Later in the day we passed through Lopburi, another old capital which in its turn was used as the summer residence of the kings of Ayuthia. It was here that, as the old king, his master, lay dying, Constantine Phaulkon, the Greek cabin-boy, educated in England, who became Prime Minister of the kingdom, was murdered in the revolution of 1688.

He had been in power during the anxious times when Thailand was struggling for her independence against swashbucklers and mercenaries from Holland, France and Britain. At last, converted by Jesuit priests, he had openly supported the French claims to paramount influence. The nobles were afraid of the power and prestige of Louis XIV, and, led by the Commander-in-Chief, Pra Pet Raksa, rose in revolt. Here is a report of the circumstances as received by the Court of Directors of the Honourable East India Company from their agents at Fort St. George, Madras. It is dated January, 1689 :

We have lately received strange news of the Great Revolution at Siam, the late King, about May last, being seized with a tedious and mortal sickness at Levo [Lopburi]. His General, a Siamese, some time before his death, possessing himself of his Pallace and garrison privately sending for Phaulkon in the Old King's name to come to him in haste upon some pretended urgent business, who no sooner within the palace gate at Levo, but his guards were surprized and himself confined a prisoner by the General, and after some days severe usage and torture for the discovery of his estate &c, was ignominiously brought out to public execution and beheaded and his body cut to pieces, and the poor mangled Phaulkon scattered among the clawing vultures, and his great estate and family seized for the King's service.

Before he met his death, the report continues, Phaulkon—

took his Seal, two silver Crosses, a relic set in gold, which he wore on his breast, being a present from the Pope, as also the Order of St. Michael, which was sent to him by the King of France, and deliver'd them to a Mandarin, who stood by, desiring him to give them to his little son.

And so the most romantic figure in Siamese history prepares for his dreadful end.

North of Lopburi the riverine towns were modern and uninteresting. On the second day we arrived at Nakon Sawan, the first big river junction, where the eastern tributaries branch off to Sukotai, Sawankalok, and Nan. Nakon Sawan means "the City of Heaven," an ancient name which the modern town, also known as Paknambo, does its best to belie. As a centre of the timber trade and an important

rice market, its prosperity is proclaimed by the corrugated iron with which its bazaars, mills and "godowns" are built. A recent visitor to that country wrote, "Iron has entered into the soul of Burma—corrugated iron!" and the same is true of Thailand. It is a pity, but the material has much to recommend it. It is cheap, it is eminently rain-proof, and it is a much better protection than bamboo walls against the pellets of the midnight gunman.

All through this straggling town the river banks are lined with rafts of teak and junglewood, sometimes two or three abreast. Paknampo is the Government Timber Revenue Station, where royalty and duty are assessed. Measuring parties from the Royal Forest Department are busy on the rafts, and their work is being checked by clerks in the employ of the European firms. There are any amount of tricks to be learnt in the measuring of rafts, and the difference in the size of a log as measured by the buyer and the seller is most illuminating.

We are passing the mouth of the deep and narrow Meyom Menan branch, up which long strings of empty paddy-boats are being towed by steam-tugs to the rice markets of Bisnulok and Sukotai. A little later we tie up at our own Company's landing stage, and deliver a mail to the Eurasian clerk in temporary charge of our Paknampo office. The sun beats down on the corrugated rattan warehouses and on the glaring rafts, and is reflected up from the river to make the eyes ache. No wonder all the measuring clerks wear dark glasses! City of Heaven! But as we leave this God-forsaken place, where later on I was to spend four years, its sordid commercialism is redeemed by a little temple set on a steep hill which rises from a grove of luxuriant mango

trees just outside the town. This little shrine, in later days, was my weekly refuge from the heat and mosquitoes of Paknampo. Here I would take up the mail, just arrived from England, and read my letters and papers in the comfort of the cool breezes which fanned the little hill.

The temple on the hill marks the beginnings of the Meping river, which gradually broadens out until it is nearly half a mile wide. The current is swifter and the water less muddy than the Menam. The masses of drifting water-hyacinth which have been a feature of the river down below have now ceased, for they come down the Meyom. Instead, small islands crowned with tall cotton-trees and densely covered with elephant grass are dotted about the broad expanse of waters. Old Ibrahim has taken the wheel, and calls one of the crew to his side. Together they peer anxiously ahead. Our speed, already checked by the current, is still further reduced, and we steer a winding course from bank to bank. It is not difficult to guess the secret of this river, which seems at first sight a magnificent waterway. It is a maze of submerged sandbars that shift their position after every flood. The navigable channel twists and turns and only an experienced eye can detect it. But as this is something like Ibrahim's fiftieth voyage, we do not worry. "What if we are a day or two late?" we ask each other in fine irony. Lying in our cane deck-chairs, we gaze sleepily over this vast river, lost to all sense of time and responsibility.

A huge red-and-black butterfly, with the wing-span of a sparrow, flutters precariously over half a mile of death. What was wrong with the bank it came from? I wonder lazily. Flocks of green parrots screech overhead, but they are only incidental. Throughout the long days we gradually make acquaint-



ance with the real river birds, the fish-eaters that with beak or claw take unceasing toll of the myriad underwater life, to which the loss of a few million units means nothing. The shallows are the preserve of the waders. White egrets dart fussily about with open wings and as often as not empty beaks. But the tall grey heron stands motionless as a sentinel, his eyes fixed on the water. He strikes seldom, but never in vain. When he is gorged he flaps heavily up to roost on the top of a gigantic resin-tree. Occasionally we see the black-and-white ibis, whose curved bill seems more appropriate to the banks of the Nile. But the giant of all the waders is the silver-grey sarus crane with vermilion head and neck, whose call is as loud as the siren of the *Bua Deng*.

Deep-water fishing evokes even greater skill. We soon notice there are several varieties of kingfisher. First there is the little blue chap with deep orange breast, the same as the bird we know at home. Then there is a bigger bird, with the same metallic blue coat but a white waistcoat, and a larger one still with a red bill. These all fish from the branches of trees which overhang the river. But a different method is pursued by the black-and-white speckled kingfisher, with a black beak and about the size of a dove, who is as good a hoverer as any hawk. He stays poised on rapidly beating wings about twenty feet above the surface of the water. Then suddenly the wings are closed and he dives like a plummet, emerging from the splash with a wriggling silver minnow in his beak.

This is the star turn until we meet the osprey or fishing eagle. This magnificent bird, the first time we saw him, had dropped from some invisible height. As he struck the water a shower of spray several

feet high entirely hid him from view. A second's pause, and the huge wings were on the upward beat again. The cruel talons gripped a fish at least a foot long, whose convulsions were cut short by a stroke of the curved beak as the osprey rose out of sight.

A school of pelicans was the next addition to our rapidly increasing store of natural history. School is exactly the right word, for they were orderliness personified. They cruised over the surface in rows, their lower-bill "scoops" let down and lifted in unison. As the *Bua Deng* approached, they rose in the perfect flight formation of wild duck, but much more slowly, and streamed arrow-like across the sky.

Villages are few and far between, and the banks are lined with thickets of the thorny bamboo, more impenetrable than any barbed-wire entanglement. Behind rose the serried ranks of the evergreen forest, tall resin-trees linked by fantastic creepers or spiky rattans. Frequently the channel compelled us to hug the banks for long stretches, during which the gloom and mystery of the pervading jungle was oppressive. The Siamese call the evergreen "pah dum"—black forest—and will not willingly enter it in the rainy season. It was a relief to turn away into midstream, and I began to understand the meaning of the phrase "jungle nerves."

At the end of a long day in which we have made poor headway against the current, we come to anchor opposite the Provincial Gendarmerie station of Sen Taw, a small township whose name means "a hundred thousand boat-poles." Native accounts of the origin of this name vary. According to some, Sen Taw is the centre of the boat-pole industry, for behind it stretch forests of "mai ruak," the particular kind of bamboo from which these poles are made. Others

say it was the spot where an invading Burmese army, weary of their march across a succession of mountain ranges, took to the river and commandeered an army of polemen to take them up to Chiengmai.

The gendarmerie station, the first I had seen, was a model of cleanliness and order. It was a substantial wooden bungalow, built on stilts and painted white, with a tiled roof. In the middle of the front verandah a sentry with fixed bayonet was on guard. Behind him, in one big room, was an orderly-table, a rack of rifles, and an iron-barred cage for prisoners. The gendarmerie uniform was on the Russian model, grey tunic and dark blue breeches, grey puttees and bare feet. The grey peaked cap had a touch of the French Foreign Legion in the cloth which hung down behind it as a sun-shield to the back of the neck. The "compound" in front of the building consisted of a trim grass lawn surrounded by flaming bushes of croton and sloping down to a white-painted landing stage, in front of which was moored an up-country poling-boat flying the Siamese Government flag—a white elephant on a red background. After dark, the sentry on guard struck a gong every hour throughout the night. Ibrahim had chosen a good anchorage, for we were in a district notorious for dacoits.

Unlike banditry in China, dacoity and river-piracy in Thailand are in the nature of an off-season's recreation rather than a full-time job. For this reason, except in the rare years of local crop failure, crimes of violence are not so serious or so widespread, but more difficult to bring to book. During the rainy season, everyone works in the rice-fields. In the hot weather, the Laos up-country go hunting or collecting jungle produce. Down-country, which means anywhere south of Raheng or Sawankalok,

the more adventurous spirits vary these pursuits with a little gangsterism. The nucleus of these gangs would be the dangerous characters known to Siamese law as "tiger-men"—the homeless jungle wanderers with a price on their head.

Above Sen Taw we began to meet the vanguard of the season's teak rafts. The navigation of these unwieldy masses of logs, like the poling of up-country boats, is a specialised craft handed down from father to son. The rafts contain over two hundred logs apiece, each log weighing about a ton, and although oblong in shape cover about five thousand square feet of water. To guide them down the elusive channel without grounding on submerged sandbars is indeed a work of art, for teak logs float deep. We pass quite close to some of the rafts, and observe their handling with interest not unmixed with excitement, for when a teak raft breaks up there is going to be damage in the fairway.

We notice that the two or three top or upstream rows of logs are firmly lashed together, and serve as a foundation for the bamboo and thatch living-hut which shelters the crew at night. Upstream from the hut is a triangular ladder of tall bamboos which serves as a "crow's-nest" or observation point for the headman of the raft. The extra height makes it easier for him to distinguish the deep-water channel in the broad waste of mud banks and shallows. Behind the ladder is fixed a stout timber bollard for the lashing of the guiding or mooring ropes. There are usually two of these, though a spare one is often carried in case of emergency. These strong hawsers, made of twisted rattans, are about two hundred feet long, and their ends are looped round the pointed ends of sapling poles about fifteen feet in length.

At the top end of each of these poles is a brakeman, looking for all the world like a monkey on a stick! These two heroes wade or swim astride their poles behind the raft all day. They are human anchors, and the prolonged immersion, even in the tropics, chills them to such an extent that they eat opium to keep them warm inside! At the headman's signal, they push the pointed ends of their poles down into the river-bed, and hang on with all their weight at the top, sometimes being pulled by the raft's "way" right out of the water. But in most cases, they are able to bring the raft to a standstill. It has stopped at the desired point, a sharp bend in the channel. The headman now signals to one of the men to pull out his pole and swim with it to the right or left of the channel, and then dig in again. When he is firmly fixed, the other man pulls out and follows him. The whole raft begins to swing round, and when it is pointing down the proper channel, the men pull out their poles and swim astride them behind the raft until the next bend is reached. Then the whole process is repeated. This primitive and precarious method of control takes the rafts down from Pak Wung, above Raheng, to Paknampo, a distance of about a hundred and fifty miles.

We pass scores of these rafts drifting downstream without incident until, as we round a sharp bend of the river a sudden squall blots out the landscape. The mist of driving rain clears away, and just ahead, in midstream, is revealed a scene of desperate activity. A large raft has struck a hidden snag in the channel, and is beginning to break up. The current here is swift. Odd logs, their tying canes broken off, are already leaving the raft and shooting away downstream. To be rammed by one of these would sink us, so Ibrahim changes course and edges out of the main

current towards the lee of the opposite bank.

On the raft confusion reigns supreme. The look-out man on the bamboo "crow's-nest" screams out orders to which no one pays any attention. Brown figures, naked except for a loin-cloth, run feverishly about the raft with bundles of fresh canes to re-tie the broken rows of logs. Others plunge into the river and swim with strong trudgeon strokes after a batch that has just broken away. Nearly a hundred yards upstream the two brakemen hang grimly on to their long poles, which are quivering with the strength of the current. Above the noise of the hissing waters and the shouts of the raft's crew, we hear the hollow thud of huge teak logs colliding, the creaks of the straining rattans and the pistol-like reports as they snap asunder.

In a few minutes the struggle is over. The tail of the raft, more firmly lashed than the rest to support the hut and bollard, swings round and piles up on a submerged sandbar. The lower half floats away in segments or single logs. It has probably taken five or six weeks to build that raft, and the labour is lost in as many minutes. No wonder the raftsmen, alone amongst our native workers, sometimes go on strike. No wonder that, at its launching from Raheng, the raft's bollard is neatly garlanded with flowers and joss-sticks are burnt to placate the river spirits who, like those of the forest and the mountains, are more courted than the Lord Buddha when danger or adventure is ahead.

Next day a few isolated hills are in sight, and one of them slopes down to the water's edge, which is fringed with a growth of dwarf willow. A little way up the hill is a tiny clearing in which stands a small joss-house, which is like an ordinary native

house in miniature, but decorated with red prayer-streamers. Ibrahim rushes up to the top deck and excitedly points to the bank. On the narrow stretch of mud between the willows and the surface of the deep pool we are crossing lies an enormous grey-green crocodile. We both pull out our revolvers to have a pot at him, but Ibrahim makes frenzied signs imploring us not to fire, and pointing at the joss-house above. "Bad luck"—he manages this much English—"ship sink!" We put our revolvers back into their holsters, and stare at the huge creature, who is evidently fast asleep. This, as we learnt later, was "The Pool of the Sacred Crocodile." The joss-house had been built in his honour, and he was said to be of an incredible age. Certainly I never again saw a crocodile of such size, nor, though in later years I passed the pool dozens of times, did I ever set eyes on him again.

Our next anchorage was at Kampeng Pet, the "City of Diamond Walls." It resembles Nakoh Sawan in that its name is the only pleasant thing about it, and also in that it provides a title for one of the most powerful and energetic Princes in the Kingdom. Both Their Royal Highnesses wisely refrain from visiting the cities from which they take their name. Little is left of old Kampeng Pet but a crumbling wall, but its hideous new bazaar defaces the left bank of the Meping. Built of cheap match-wood and corrugated iron, the shops stand on piles overhanging the bank, which is strewn with the garbage and filth of rubbish-heaps and middens, amongst which pariahs and crows and even Chinese geese are scavenging with zest. But there are always compensations, for on the other bank stands a well-preserved temple whose tall gilded pagoda is visible for miles up-river.

Between Kampeng Pet and Raheng the river grew wider and shallower, and once we grounded on a sandbar in midstream. Ibrahim and his crew and even our Chinese "boys" jumped into the river and waded waist-deep up to the bows, where they shoved and pulled without effect. Eventually crowbars were produced, and the *Bua Deng* literally levered into deep water. Late in the afternoon we stuck again, and this time Jones and I waded in to help, to the huge amusement of the crew. Then and ever after I found that the spectacle of a white man voluntarily undertaking coolie labour, as we sometimes did for exercise when short of it, was always considered a joke of the first magnitude.

In this connection, a man from another firm once told me that an American missionary, on an evangelising tour of this man's district, asked his permission to give a magic-lantern lecture to his Kamu coolies. The lecture was not a success from the missionary's point of view though the Kamus enjoyed it hugely. There was a good deal of tittering at the menial occupations of the white-faced disciples, but when Jesus Christ, an obvious "burra-sahib," appeared carrying the heavy Cross over His shoulders there was an uncontrolled and spontaneous burst of laughter which brought the house down.

It was near sunset when we reached Raheng. The river took a wide, semicircular sweep to the east, and the old-fashioned town was spread out in panorama. It was practically unspoiled by modern buildings, and the teak-built houses were mostly roofed with red tiles which caught the last rays of the sun, against a background of palms and pagodas. Away on the other bank towered Doi Luang, a mountain four thousand feet high crowned with a



grassy knoll which emerged dome-like from the surrounding evergreen. Seen from just this angle, and at this time of day, which was the usual time of arrival, Raheng never failed in all the years I knew it to welcome the traveller with a scene of beauty and peace. Moreover, it had no high-sounding name with which to disappoint you!

## CHAPTER IV

### THE RIVER OF POOLS

A mile above Raheng a landing-stage jutted out into the river. Behind it rose a large tile-roofed house set back in a shady "compound," in a corner of which was a tall white flagstaff. At the moment of our arrival the Company's house-flag was being hauled down for the night by a Ghurka watchman in khaki uniform, who had a rifle slung across his shoulders. The bamboo "lathi" was evidently superseded up-country by a more serviceable weapon! As we tied up to the landing-stage a tall, thin English accompanied by a wire-haired fox-terrier walked down the pontoon gangway to meet us. It was Ellis, our Raheng manager, the best-known "shikari" in Thailand.

He told us that as it was nearly dusk, it would be too late to unload the specie that evening. We should have to sleep on the *Bua Deng* as usual. But he posted the armed Ghurka on board, and invited us over to his bungalow for drinks and dinner. The building, although called a bungalow, was two-storeyed, the office and strong-room on the ground floor and the living quarters above. As we walked along the garden path between tall hybiscus hedges, what a relief to stretch our legs after the cramped quarters of the launch!

The verandah and dining-room of Ellis's bungalow were decorated with his trophies. Two fine tiger-skins and a panther skin covered the floor of

the verandah between the basket chairs. On the walls were the heads of bison, "tsaing" (red cattle), wild buffalo, sambhur, serow, brow-antlered deer, hog-deer and barking-deer. The deer heads were properly mounted, but the bison, buffalo and red cattle were skulls only, painted white with an inscription "Mewong" and date on each. This Mewong forest, evidently a big-game paradise, lay twelve days' march to the south-west of Raheng, in the hinterland between Paknampho and the Burmese border. It was the wildest teak forest in the country, and practically uninhabited. Some years later I was to achieve the distinction of being the only European to spend the rainy season in Mewong. I have no wish to repeat the experience.

Ellis was tall and athletic-looking, with blue eyes that occasionally seemed to gaze beyond one into vacancy. In the few days we stayed with him we both learned to love a charming personality, with an impish sense of humour and an amazing absent-mindedness. Fear was a complete stranger to him. He had been terribly mauled by a tiger, made an almost miraculous recovery, and still went on bagging them, generally on foot. His total at that date was over twenty tiger, easily a record for Thailand. Big-game hunting and a little farm in Sussex he had bought against his retirement and of which he showed us numerous photos, were his hobbies, but he was exceedingly well informed and could talk on almost any subject.

Yet this was the man who led the loneliest existence of any station manager in the country. Determined to save money rather than spend his salary in senseless and extravagant entertaining, he had consistently refused charge of the bigger stations, and ran the huge Raheng district with only one

assistant, on leave at the time of our visit. Occasionally "Mac," a Scotchman from another firm, would spend a month of the rafting season in Raheng, but he and Ellis generally missed each other, Ellis being as likely as not out on tour at the time. For at least nine months of the year Ellis lived entirely alone.

A glance round the room soon revealed one of his antidotes to solitude. He had a good library, ranging from the Victorian classics to the latest novels and autobiographies. One shelf was filled with books on Asiatic big game. He offered to lend us some of his books for the remainder of our journey, but, like fools, we declined, afraid of the delay and difficulty in returning them. What would either of us have given, a few weeks later, for something to read!

Looking back, I am trying to think of any obvious signs in Ellis of the lonely life he had led for the last ten years, for this was the period he had been in charge of Raheng at the time of our visit. Beyond a certain slowness of speech, there was no indication of abnormality except his absent-mindedness, which was entirely spasmodic. While working in his office, or sometimes even in the middle of a conversation, his eyes would suddenly get that far-away look, and for a few moments he would be almost in a trance. Then, with a jerk and a slight shiver, he would be himself again.

That evening we were to have another insight into the psychology of loneliness. Just before dinner there arrived another solitary soul, the Scotchman "Mac." He had come down from up-river on one of his rare visits to Raheng. On seeing strangers, he almost backed down the staircase, but Ellis warmly welcomed him in, and had another place laid for

dinner. "Mac" was the shyest creature I have ever met before or since. His silences were oppressive, his embarrassments almost painful. During dinner he kept his eyes fixed on his plate, and he never once ventured to address Jones or myself. His conversation with Ellis was almost monosyllabic, though it was obvious the two were old friends. He rose to go as soon as dinner was over, and refused a parting drink. We all heaved a sigh of relief!

"Mac's a quaint old bird," Ellis observed when he had gone.

"We are very rarely both in Raheng at the same time, but when we are, we spend alternate evenings at each other's place. Poor old Mac spends all his time up and down river, never sees a soul, and has got so unused to talking his own language he has almost given it up! Loneliness has given him a terrible inferiority complex. When I go round to him, or he comes here, we often sit for half an hour on end without speaking a word! He must have been the dourest of Scots before he came out here, though he has a heart of gold. But now he just can't bear conversation—to him it is something entirely artificial and generally unnecessary!"

I began to wonder how this business of living alone was going to suit me.

That night we got a taste of the Raheng mosquitoes, as our nets on the top deck had been blown open by the night breeze while we were at dinner. The Chinese "boys," of course, had gone down town to the bazaar. We tucked our nets in before discovering they were full of hungry mosquitoes from the "jheel" which stretched behind Ellis's bungalow. There was nothing for it but to cover as much of ourselves as we could with the bed-clothes,

and hope for the best. We spent a dreadful night, and in the morning our sheets and pillows were spotted with blood. High up in the net hung some gorged mosquitoes, literally swollen with our blood. They could scarcely fly, and we massacred them with relish.

After breakfast with Ellis, we started unloading the specie into his strong-room, where it was to remain for two or three days until he had been able to hire up-country boats large enough to take ourselves, our stores, and the money up-river. A dozen of Ellis's Kamu coolies worked in relays, and soon had the boxes piled up in the concrete strong-room which occupied a corner of the large office. The iron door banged to, and was locked with Ellis's key. We were free of our responsibilities for a while! Then Ibrahim came into the office, salaamed, and received a packet of mails for Bangkok. Then we strolled on to the landing-stage to see the *Bua Deng* off. Ibrahim and his villainous-looking crew were wreathed in smiles, for the last up-country trip of the season was safely over. The *Bua Deng* cast off, swung round into the channel, and chugged away down river at her best speed. Our last link with civilisation was gone!

Our stay at Raheng passed all too quickly. It was an interesting place in that it was a border town between the Siamese and Laos. It was here we first saw women with their hair long knotted into a "bun" at the nape of the neck, who wore striped skirts instead of the ugly "panung." These were the Laos, a northern branch of the Siamese race, who have a slightly different dialect and writing, and are in general less sophisticated and more primitive. North of Raheng the whole population was Lao, though the higher civil and military officials were Siamese.

Then there were those quaint-looking coolies of Ellis's, the Kamus, about whom I asked him. They wore their hair long and screwed it into a knot at the side of the head, which was covered with a silk turban. They wore a kind of Chinese jacket, and long bell-shaped trousers of dark blue cloth. Their faces were kindly, hairless and effeminate. Ellis explained that they were a hill-tribe from French Indo-China, who come down to Thailand year after year to work in the teak forests. They arrive in gangs of about twenty, in charge of two headmen, and sign on for two years at seventy or eighty rupees a year. An initial advance of five rupees per man is paid over to the two headmen, who then return home. In two years' time, punctually to the day, they return to collect their men and take them home.

As the teak companies also provide them with rice, tobacco, salt and chillies (to curry their food) many of the Kamus are able to save quite respectable sums out of their two years' wages. But quite a proportion of them stay on voluntarily at the end of their period. Others settle down in Thailand for good, marry Lao wives, and in some cases end up as quite prosperous farmers.

They are a gentle, childlike race, like most hill tribes incredibly dirty, but are easily taught the virtues of cleanliness. Unfortunately, they are just as easily corruptible by bad influences. Ellis said that in Raheng district they are apt to take to opium and arrack, and degenerate accordingly. I found out in later years that though they are easy to handle, a bad Kamu is just as slippery a customer as any of these Far Eastern tribes.

In the evening Ellis took us snipe shooting round the edge of the "jheel" behind the office. It

was at once obvious that his skill was not confined to the rifle. Few of his rising birds got away, and he brought off some pretty overhead shots at the returning "swoopers." Poor old Jones, as he freely admitted, was a novice and failed to bag a bird. I too found the birds difficult to see in the evening light against a background of sedge, but managed to get three couple. It was in retrieving one of these from water about knee-deep that I made my first acquaintance with the elephant leech.

After walking on a bit, I felt an intolerable itching in the calf of my leg, and scratched at the place without looking. I felt something soft and slimy and bent down to see a horrible thing as big as a fat cigar. Its head was embedded in between a fold in my puttees, its tail in another fold. I wrenched it free (it stretched like elastic!) and flung it away with a curse. There was a sharp stinging sensation as it was torn loose, and when I took off my puttees on arrival at the bungalow they were soaked with blood. It took a lot of cold water to stop the flow, and then were revealed two pairs of small punctures in the skin, on which I smeared iodine. But this did not prevent a festering sore which lasted for days. After dinner we would draw Ellis out about his shooting experiences, and listened with rapt attention. Incidentally, he gave us some excellent advice, with particular emphasis for Jones's benefit, who wasn't very keen on shooting himself.

"Make shooting one of your hobbies," said Ellis. "You will never get better practice than out here. When you are merely on the march (and some of your treks will be for a week or more on end) your elephants will have reached camp by midday, you will have had lunch and perhaps a lie-off during the heat of the afternoon, and there is nothing but



boredom for the remainder of the day. But if you are keen on shooting, you can spend that last couple of hours of daylight wandering about with a gun. You are almost sure to bag something for the pot, to vary the eternal chicken, but even if you don't you will at least have seen some interesting bird, animal or reptile, and added a bit to your knowledge of natural history.

"This, by the way, is another hobby you might well take up. You will find every encouragement. The Bombay Natural History Society has a lot of members in Thailand, and we have quite a flourishing Society of our own as well. A pal of mine, for instance, specialised on the smaller Siamese mammals. He had only taken up the subject for a few months, but in that time he discovered two or three new species and a new genus of mouse. Another man I know specialises in snakes and has a python at the Zoo named after him. Then again, Thailand is practically untouched by the entomologist. But whatever your preference, for Heaven's sake wander out from camp in the evening, and do something in the way of sport or observation, otherwise you'll just sit in your tent and soak whisky!"

The longer I lived in the country, the more I realised the value of Ellis's advice. It was due to him that I took up shooting with enthusiasm, and gave myself an interest when stationed in the most God-forsaken places. When I had become accustomed to being alone, the wilder the forest I was in the more I was pleased, for the greater was the chance of seeing and bagging big game. And, come to think of it, not one of the men who died of drink in my time was keen on shooting!

The next evening we got Ellis to tell us all about his being mauled by a tiger. First he showed

us the scar, which reached across the right side of his stomach from hip to navel. Only fractions of an inch had saved him from being disembowelled. He had been carried from the Mewong across country to the Menam by forced marches, rushed down by launch to Bangkok, patched up in the hospital there and sent home by the first boat available. Although he had been well treated and was apparently making a quick recovery, the wound started to fester again towards the end of the voyage home, and he was in a bad way by the time he reached Plymouth. There followed several weeks in a London nursing-home before he was out of danger.

The tiger had killed a small sambhur, whose half-eaten carcase lay in a little open glade near the Mewong river. There was a thick patch of elephant grass on the river side of the glade, and Ellis's "boy," a Lao, who knew something of a tiger's habits, and had come across the dead sambhur, felt sure the tiger was lying up in the tall grass. He reported to Ellis, who at once sent for a couple of elephants from the camp. Their mahouts were each given a bag of stones. Ellis posted the elephants on the river side of the "kaing" grass, and took his stand behind a tree on the edge of the glade. At a signal, the mahouts moved their elephants up, and started to pelt the patch of grass with stones. Almost at once the tiger came slinking out into the glade, and was promptly bowled over by Ellis's rifle. But it sprang to its feet again, and charged straight at him, a distance of about thirty yards. Half-way, he knocked it over again, but it still had some fight left. It struggled up again in a flash and sprang at him, each foreleg slashing blindly sideways. Ellis had not quite time to reload, and was just too late in dodging behind the tree: the tiger's right claws

just caught him as it passed. But it was a dying effort, for it collapsed just beyond him as he sank to the ground in agony and fainted away. The terrified mahouts found man and beast apparently dead side by side.

Next day Ellis announced that, after much bargaining, he had at last succeeded in hiring two up-country boats to take us on our next stage of the journey up north. They were similar to the boat we had seen tied up at the gendarmerie station at Sen Taw, but larger, and held a double crew. A single crew of Lao boatmen poles for an hour and rests for an hour throughout the day, but with a double crew one is supposed to keep going all day. I say "supposed" advisedly, in view of the later stages of my journey, though Jones was more fortunate.

That evening we found the two up-country boats tied up alongside our landing-stage, ready for a start next day. These boats are quite distinctive, and peculiar to the north of Thailand. They are about thirty-five feet long, with a seven-foot beam and a two-foot draught and their keels are stoutly built of teakwood. The bows form an open deck, used as a poling platform, and end in a sloping prow made of a single thick piece of timber, which is set at an angle of about sixty degrees to the deck, and at first sight seems merely ornamental. It is, however, the starting point of the poling crew, and its slope lends an added drive to their feet. Astern of this open deck the cargo is stored amidships, and protected by a semi-circular roof of plaited bamboos, well resined over and waterproof. The stern of the boat is a roomy cabin, whose curved roof is about two feet higher than the middle of the boat, thus enabling the steersman, who stands in front of the

cabin, to keep a good lookout ahead. The stern is finished off with an upward-curving fishtail, which balances the prow in front and gives a graceful appearance to the whole. The steersman wields an enormous steering-oar, which trails from the back of the boat. The cabin is painted white outside, and the Company's house-flag flutters from a flagstaff at the steersman's side. Strange craft these seemed after the *Bua Deng*, but built on pleasing lines and steady in the water.

The steersman is in command of the boat, and is called "Nairoi," the Siamese word for captain. He knows the channels so well that in the lower reaches his job is an easy one. But in the rapids, so Ellis told us, the safety of the boat will often depend on his manipulation of the giant oar which takes both hands and all his strength to control. The boat must never be allowed to lose way or get broadside on to the current. Owing to its low freeboard it is easily swamped, and its stout teak timbers will not save it if dashed against the rocks. The gaunt skeletons of battered hulks projecting from the pebbly beaches which often fringe the rapids are grim reminders of the dangers of these wild rivers.

The crew consists of four polemen who are experts in a specialised craft handed down from father to son. It is much too hard work for the average Lao villager. Each poleman, with his long bamboo pole held horizontally breast-high, starts from the middle of the boat, where the cargo-space ends, facing upstream and walks briskly up the deck to the summit of the sloping prow. With a quick about-turn, he comes down the slope again, at the same moment plunging the steel-pronged end of his pole into the bed of the river with his right hand, whilst his left keeps the blunt end of the pole braced against the

muscles between neck and shoulder. Bending almost double, he pushes his way back to where he started, passing under the lifted poles of the other three polemen. Hardly has he left the prow than another is in his place, and so the propulsion is continuous, at least two of the four poles being in the water at the same time. The boat thus keeps quite a good "way," and though the pace varies with the strength of the current, a good crew in normal conditions can work the boat upstream at about three knots.

Next morning we loaded our stores and the specie into these two boats, said good-bye to Ellis, and headed for the unknown. We were to go together as far as the mouth of the Mewung, about twenty miles north of Raheng, and the end of our first day's trip. Our boats keep within a few lengths of each other all the time, and at the end of every hour our second crew, who have been lounging or sleeping in the cramped cargo hold, take over their poles from the first. The river is more than half a mile broad, and at first the banks are lined with picturesque tile-roofed houses built high on piles, the strung-out suburbs of Raheng. Then elephant grass and thorny bamboo divide the river, unknown to us from a chain of swamps and "jheels" on both banks which provide some of the best duck-shooting in the country. In later years we stored hundreds of teak rafts in these broad reaches, and the weary task of classifying the timber was enlivened by many an evening's good sport.

In the distance are wooded hills, one of them crowned with a small pagoda. There are several islands in midstream, some of them cleared and planted with tobacco, but most a waste of tangled elephant grass. We soon come to a series of villages where the building of these Lao boats is evidently a

local industry. Teak rafts are also being made up alongside both banks, for this is also a big salvage station. In times of flood the villagers swim out into the current carrying a bamboo pole and a length of rattan, climb up on to a log and bring it into the bank. They get paid twenty-five cents for every log salvaged, and on a good flood make a lot of money.

The villages have given way to jungle again, and in the evening we moor to a large sandbar which marks the mouth of the Mewung river. Above it the Meping curves away in majestic breadth, while the Mewung at its mouth looks an insignificant side-stream, narrow and fringed with the eternal elephant grass. I began to envy Jones both his river and the larger station to which he was going. But then I thought of Ellis, and how he told us that the bigger the station you are in the less money you save. Both he and Mac stuck to the lonely Raheng station with the one object of saving money. Both left the country with a small fortune, and both were dead within a couple of years of retirement.

Our boats were moored together, and Jones and I spent our last evening in company. To-morrow we should know what it feels like to be utterly alone. We sat up late talking of the past and making plans for the future. We still had little idea of the kind of life in store for us, and less of its effect on our own character. We were both young and strong and at least physically capable of resisting the strain of a tropical climate. But how would a life alone test our mental and spiritual endurance? That was a question it might take years to answer. One sometimes envied, in after years, the many new recruits (and some of them seemed ideally suitable for the life) who decided almost at once that they "couldn't stick it."

Early next morning I waved good-bye to Jones as his boat disappeared behind a sandbar of the broad Meping, while mine was pointed up the narrow and gloomy Mewung. The name means "The River of Pools," and the river was often too deep for the boatmen's long poles. So we had to hug the banks, overshadowed by the tall elephant grass whose density was unbroken for mile after mile. The river was only about twenty yards wide, and at bends we would pole frantically to get up enough "way" to shoot across to the opposite bank. Even so progress was difficult, for the banks were deep in mud and the polemen were often cursing as their poles got stuck. Sometimes a bush or tree jutted out from the bank and the boatmen would round it carefully with their pronged poles levered against a branch. Round the third or fourth bend there was a loud splash, and I heard the word "takay" (crocodile). As we passed the spot I could see the broad furrow in the mud where its huge body had slithered down into the depths.

The water was high, and although the current was not strong we made painfully slow progress. Occasionally large teak logs drifted down on us, and had to be fended off. At the end of a day of deadly monotony we were still in the elephant grass country. As soon as we had tied up for the night, the air was filled with the drone of myriads of mosquitoes. They soon found me out (how they adore new blood!) and the only thing to do was to retire under my mosquito net. I hopped out of bed for dinner, which was an agony of scratching, and then back again for the night. I lay and tossed for hours before I could sleep. Lack of exercise was already becoming a nightmare.

That day was the pattern of many, as we crept

slowly upstream between the walls of elephant grass. In the early morning and evening its height gave a little welcome shade, but in the middle hours it kept off any possible breeze as the sun beat down on the attap roof of the cabin and the heat became almost unendurable. It was, had I known it, one of the most trying periods of the year, the end of the rainy season, before the change of monsoon has brought the cooler winds. Not a breath of air stirred the high plumes of papyrus that stood out white here and there amongst the eternal green. There was nothing to do but read, read and read, and in a week I had finished every book and paper I possessed. Then I started reading the advertisements. At first they seemed clever and amusing, and full of a sincere belief in the virtues of the products they extolled. But when I had read them all through a dozen times, they revealed themselves as cheap and banal balderdash, obviously misrepresenting values, utterly without any claim to trust or interest. Finally I flung all the papers away, and started reading through the books again. Luckily, before I was quite sick of these, we broke out of the elephant grass into open and inhabited country.

When I say we had been a week on the Mewung, it is merely guesswork, for I had lost all count of time. I had not yet learnt to keep a diary, and enter it up even if there is nothing to record. This is the only way of maintaining contact with reality. Anyhow, the great thing was we had finished with the elephant grass, which was beginning to get on my nerves. It seemed early days to get into that state of mind, but I had nothing to do, there was nothing to see, and nowhere to go. Now it was a great relief to see other human beings and their villages and their animals. Also, the river had



broadened out, and there was a view. There were ranges of small hills in the distance. And by the side of the river sandbars began to appear, and children were playing and flying kites for there was a breeze at last. The sandbars were a pleasant change, but I did not realise at the time that they meant a rapid fall in the river level.

Even the polemen seemed to relish the changed conditions. The river of course was shallower as it broadened, and their work was easier. They were stalwart youths, naked except for cotton "shorts" and scarves round their necks to ease the pressure of the pole, and of good physique except for one or two who were disfigured by an enlarged spleen, the aftermath of malaria. They lost no opportunity of engaging in cheerful conversation with villagers on the banks. Their sallies provoked roars of laughter, and when addressed to a group of girls were answered with shrieks of merriment. Later, when I understood the language, I realised that boatmen are apt to pay to the fair sex compliments as outrageous as they are unprintable. But modesty was seldom offended, for everyone seemed to regard boatmen as privileged purveyors of repartee, and their humour was expected to be extremely broad, like that of our own Thames watermen a few centuries ago.

Point was added to the boatmen's compliments by the free and easy way in which the Lao women and girls went down to the river to bathe, in marked contrast to their Siamese sisters. Wading into the water with one garment, a skirt or "sin," knotted under their armpits, they would loosen it, draw it over their heads, and sit down in the river, all in one motion. Then they would twist the "sin" into a turban round their heads. So long as their lower

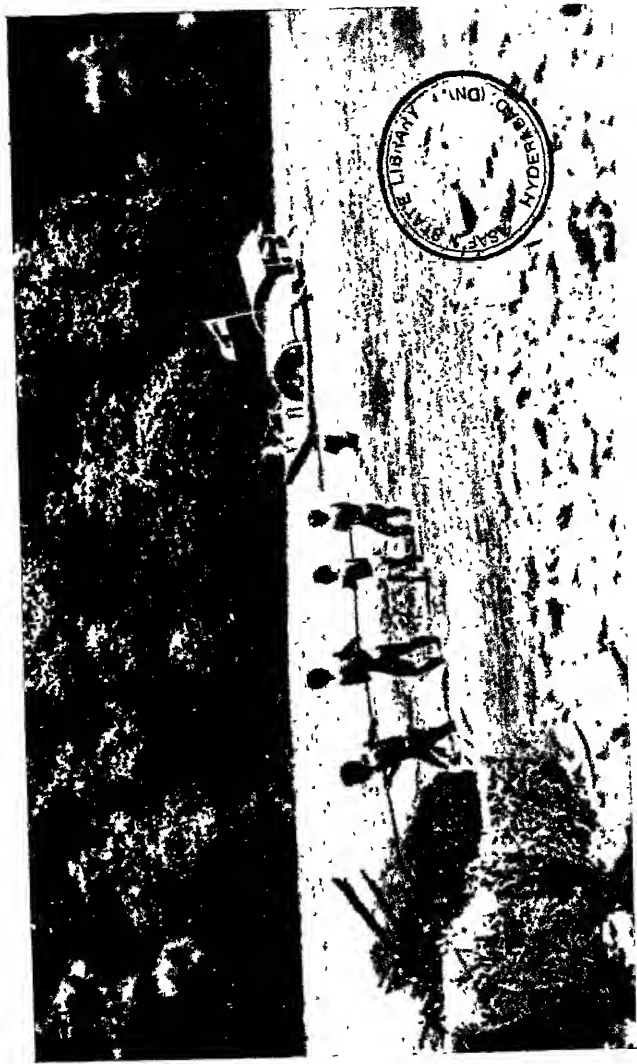
limbs were covered by the water, modesty was satisfied. It was most noticeable how much lighter coloured was the skin which was normally covered by clothing, a proof of how much the sun affects pigmentation in a Mongolian race. The boatmen obviously commented on the girls' figures in their loudest tones, and were answered by smiles or self-conscious giggles. These Laos are certainly more primitive than the Siamese, less self-important, and probably more good-humoured.

It was soon obvious even to me that the river was falling steadily. Next day we grounded on a submerged sandbar, and with a sigh of resignation the steersman got down from his high stool, and went into the hold. He came out carrying a kind of wooden spade or plough, made of a short plank bored with two holes at either end, to which rattan ropes were attached, and a long handle in the middle. Then, with the help of the crew, he proceeded before my astonished eyes to dig a channel out of the sandy bed of the river! Standing opposite his men, he dug the plank into the sand, weighed it down with the sole of his foot while standing on the other, and the men pulled it by the rattan ropes through the sand for about five or six feet. They kept on repeating this process until two walls of sand had appeared above water, and were growing steadily higher. At the end of half an hour they decided the channel was deep enough, and then proceeded to push and haul the boat through it until we were in floating water again.

"Thank God that's over," I thought, for the whole process had wasted nearly an hour. But later in the day we grounded again, and this time it took much longer to get the boat afloat. Next day the digging was repeated many times, and seemed to

take longer on each occasion. Then at last I began to realise what the rest of the journey was going to be. Digging one's way up a river! It was fantastic! It was a dream, surely, or a nightmare! Some days we could not have made more than a mile. The boredom of it was intolerable. The boat became a prison, or rather an asylum, with the steersmen and crew fellow-maniacs. To such a point had degenerated a journey undertaken in the spirit of high adventure, that I almost wept with sheer *ennui*.

Sanity was saved at last by a marked change in the river scenery. The Mewung began to narrow as hills sloped down to the banks, and soon we were entering a series of gorges. The boatmen were able to pole again, and the relief of being on the move once more was wonderful. But the current was getting stronger, and, rounding a bend, we could hear a continuous muffled roar. We had arrived at the first of the Mewung rapids. The river bed was full of jagged rocks and boulders which broke up the water into half a dozen foaming channels which all looked quite impossible to navigate, yet one of them was the right one. The steersman brought the boat alongside a pebbly beach at the foot of the rapid and moored her to a projecting boulder. Then he dived into the hold and brought out coil upon coil of a large rattan hawser. One end was hitched round the prow, and four of the crew scrambled upstream or along the rocky banks paying out the hawser for about a hundred yards and secured the other end to a rock in the river. The steersman went back to his place and took charge of his enormous oar, and the rest of the crew poled the boat into midstream. Then the men who had taken the hawser up-river proceeded to pull the boat up the rapid, straining like a tug-of-war crew, while the men in the boat poled frantically.



“The men who had taken the hawser up-river proceeded to pull the boat up the rapid”



The steersman, lashing the foaming water with his long oar, guided the boat up a curving channel, and after about five minutes of hair-raising struggle, during which the raging current nearly dashed the boat against a jagged rock in midstream, we were once more in comparatively calm water.

There followed at least a mile of easy poling up a shady gorge bordered by rocky cliffs several hundred feet high before we came to the next rapid, which was negotiated in the same way. After two or three of these impossible-looking cataracts had been safely passed I began to feel confidence in my crew and their primitive methods. But it only needed the cane hawser to part or one of the boatmen's poles to snap in two and we were done for. There were deep pools at the bottom of most of these rapids, and it was not difficult to guess that many a wreck lay waterlogged in their dark depths.

We took about two days getting through the rapids country, and the excitement was a relief after the boredom of the last part of the journey. But when we came out of the last gorge into open country again, the water was still falling and digging once more became the order of the day. The truth was that this boat was too big and much too overloaded to get up the Mewung except on flood water. So for day after day I sat and stewed in the cabin while the sun beat down on its flimsy roof and on the glaring sandbars which fringed the water, while the crew sweated at their eternal task of digging a channel. We were all nearing the end of our patience, when one morning a native on the bank called out to us, and waved something white in his hand. As we drew near I saw with great excitement it was a letter. The steersman stopped the boat, for we were actually doing a spell of poling at the time, and the messenger

waded out to the cabin and handed me an envelope addressed to me *in English!* I had regained contact with the real world! The nightmare was over!

I tore open the envelope and read:

LAKON,

Oct. 25th.

DEAR WILLIAMS,

I have been very worried about you for some time, as you are long overdue. I suppose the river is too low for your boat, so have sent along four bullock carts with gendarmerie escort. There is a rough kind of cart-road from Ban Dong onwards. The bearer is my office messenger, and he will act as guide. I have also sent you one of my ponies. You should make Lakon from Ban Dong in a day, but it would take you another week in the boat under present conditions! Hoping to see you soon,

Yours sincerely,

A. B. SMITH

We struggled on for another mile, and then, rounding a bend, I saw the bullock carts standing by a temple wall, and four gendarmes with rifles in the crooks of their arms squatting on the bank. I could have danced with joy! I felt like a man coming out of prison, but the sentence I had just served, had I known it, was a very mild one indeed.

## CHAPTER V

### *THE TREADMILL*

THE sergeant of gendarmerie, whose three stripes were attached to his left arm by a couple of safety-pins, saluted, said something which I did not understand, and posted two men by the boat while he and the other stood over the bullock carts to supervise the loading of the specie. As the boatmen carried the boxes out of the hold and up the bank, I sat on a box of tinned stores and checked the specie as it was loaded into the carts. At last all was ready, and the little fawn-coloured bullocks, not much bigger than donkeys, were yoked in. I hopped on Smith's pony, the bullocks were set in motion by shouts and curses, the gendarmes took up their position each man to a cart, and off we rumbled.

The road turned its back on the river, and passing through a forest of areca palms which half concealed a straggling village, debouched on to a large rice-plain. It was highly embanked, with ditches full of water on either side, and every mile or so we had to cross a rickety wooden bridge. Some of these swayed most alarmingly as the bullock carts rattled over them, and at last we came to one with so many planks missing that the bullocks would not face it. But cart tracks showed a short detour down into the ditch and up on to the embankment again. The first cart splashed down into the water, but lost so much impetus in its muddy depths that the bullocks only just managed to breast the opposite



slope, their hoofs skidding wildly on the slippery track. The second cart got firmly stuck in the mud, and we had to unload the specie boxes before we could get it out again. The Lao drivers of the third and fourth carts were taking no chances. Backing their frightened beasts about twenty yards, they laid on their whips and took the whole business in a flying, swaying rush, shouting, screaming, cursing, as the agonised bulls pounded up the embankment.

At the end of the rice-plain, which was crossed without further excitement, the road wound through a series of villages which became larger and more populous every mile, and which I began to realise were the suburbs of Lakon. Bazaar stalls and even shops began to appear, and presently we passed a race-course and a pavilion which must be the local club. Then we clattered through a gateway in a tall hedge and drew up before the office of the London and Bangkok Teak Company. Smith, a tall, pleasant-faced man wearing glare-glasses, came out to meet me, and together we superintended the unloading of the specie into his strong-room. Once more, as at Raheng, the iron door clanged on my late responsibility, and once more I breathed a sigh of relief, this time with the added satisfaction that I had safely delivered the goods to their final destination.

Smith took me upstairs and showed me my room, one of three over the office building. Then we crossed the large "compound" over to the manager's bungalow for tea. Here I noticed for the first time how much better quarters were provided for the manager than for the staff. Smith's bungalow was larger than the office building, yet reserved for him alone. He had, it is true, a spare bed-room in which he was expected to put up the General Manager on the latter's annual up-country tour.

But we three miserable assistants (the other two were out in the forests at the time) were herded together in one noisy building, with the office underneath and native houses near by. I decided there and then to "sweat blood" in order to become a manager in the shortest possible time!

After tea, ponies were brought round, and we rode down to the club. Here I was introduced to the British Vice-Consul, the British legal adviser to the local Siamese court, and to the managers of two or three other teak firms, one of whom was a most amusing little Cockney who ragged the Consul unmercifully. I must say the Consul took it in good part, but he was not long enough out from home to have acquired the pomposity of his position, and the little Cockney was obviously determined that he should remain human during his time in Lakon. The legal adviser looked a sick man (I learnt afterwards he had had a rotten time with malaria), but the others seemed fit enough. We tossed out for a four at tennis, and the two left over decided on a round of golf. Incredible as it may seem, a nine-hole course had been constructed by zig-zagging across the polo ground which formed the centre of the race-course, though there were only two bunkers and five greens!

After our games, we put on sweaters or coats and sat round a table in the club verandah. My companions were very ordinary men, not distinguished in brains or culture, but to me, after weeks of solitude, they seemed the best fellows in the world. Their stock continued to rise during the evening, for everyone insisted on standing a round of drinks, and I was soon regarding my new friends with increased and alcoholic benevolence! Never before, except at some special celebration, had I had

so much to drink in an evening, yet it was all in a day's work at the Lakon Sports Club, and nobody but me turned a hair! It was the unwritten rule in the club that, except at Christmas meetings, each member of the circle should stand a drink, so fearful was everyone of being thought mean or stingy. This was but one example of the way money went west in station life, as Ellis had warned me. Later I discovered a very good way of dodging several rounds was to have one's evening bath at the club, which meant bringing down one's own servants to prepare it, which was all a valuable waste of time!

Finally, Smith rose to go, and I followed him, none too steadily, I am afraid, to where the "sais" was holding our ponies. Fortunately, my pony was as quiet as a lamb, or I am sure I should have fallen off on the way home! I was Smith's guest at dinner, and after a little food had sobered up sufficiently to apologise for my lapse. Smith laughed and said that after so many weeks without exercise he was not at all surprised that my liver could not stand up to the club habits. Also, most of the drinks were some form of gin, which is most insidious. At any rate, I shall never forget my first experience of up-country club life nor the immunity of the members from the effects of a consumption which at home would send most men under the table! It was *quot homines, tot sententiae* translated into terms of alcohol!

Next morning Smith called me over to his bungalow, and we walked down the garden path and through a gate in the hedge on to the river bank. Two female elephants were standing near the water, flapping their ears and waving trunks and tails to keep off the flies. On their backs coolies had just fitted "howdahs" made of teak-wood resting on canvas bolsters stuffed with fibre to prevent galling, and

secured by broad girths and rope cruppers. These, Smith explained, were my transport elephants, and together with four Kamu carriers, were the Company's travelling allowance for each assistant. The elephants were named Mebua and Medok, were young and quite fast, being capable of two and a half miles an hour! To all intents and purposes they were now my very own, and I was responsible from now on for their health and strength, on which depended my mobility.

Smith explained that travelling elephants must not work much beyond midday, as they cannot stand prolonged exposure to the sun. They are let loose in the jungle to graze at night, so must be caught early if one is to do much more than ten miles a day. I was to start up for Muang Wung forest next day, where Brown, the senior assistant, was working, and learn from him the art of "girdling," or ring-barking the green teak. As Muang Wung was about eighty miles away, the journey would take about a week! Further, I ought to give the transport elephants a day's rest about half-way up, as no working elephants are supposed to do more than four days' running, after which they normally rest for three! In addition to this, Smith said, they have three months' rest in the hot season! Half of every day off, three days' holiday per week and three months per year!! These figures were a complete revelation to me. But in later years I found that any serious attempt to get more work out of elephants was almost invariably fatal.

The day was spent in looking out two months' stores, for that was to be the length of my first jungle trip, after which Brown and I were to come down to Lakon for the Christmas meeting. In addition to the stores, I was to take up two thousand

rupees for Brown's forest requirements, and was issued with an official specie-box, which held just that amount. The box was made of half-inch-thick teak, and an iron band with padlock was clamped around it. At the other side of the box from the padlock was an iron chain about a yard long ending in a ring. When in camp, Smith explained, the chain was to be passed through the metal struts of my camp-bed, and the ring secured to the padlock. The box could not thus be taken away without the bed as well, and at night presumably I was on the bed! Once again, I was told always to sleep with my revolver under my pillow. I found that in the long run one was hardly ever without specie in one's charge, either in great or small amounts, even the latter being enough to tempt the average native. This specie was thus a constant nightmare and potential source of danger. One got used to it, however, and its care became second nature. And I was only successfully robbed once, and then by my own "boy"!

Next morning I was called at six, and all my kit was piled on the elephants, who had been tied up and hand-fed the night before. Breakable stuff like crockery and bottles were packed into two large baskets connected by a bamboo carrying-pole and carried by the four coolies. My Chinese "boy" from Bangkok was now made cook, and I was given a Lao "boy" who could not speak a word of English, so for the first few weeks the cook's rôle was doubled with that of interpreter, not that his English was very good! A "sais" or pony-boy engaged for me by Smith completed my *ménage*. He was to look after the regulation two ponies, one provided free by the Company on condition one bought another. For their upkeep we received an allowance of twenty-five rupees a month. Smith had got me a small bay

as second pony, the other he sold me being the grey he had sent to meet me, an old polo pony called Rajah.

The elephants swung out of the compound gate and padded down the dusty main street of Lakon. Behind them plodded the "boy," the cook and the four carriers, while the pony-boy waited with his charges while I strolled over to Smith's bungalow for breakfast. He gave me a few parting words of advice, including an injunction to take the greatest possible care of my transport elephants. They must always be kept fat. Once an elephant shows its ribs the end is not far off. I began to realise that these enormous creatures were as much a responsibility as an infant in arms. I was also told not to let them graze near native cattle, in case they should catch one or other of the dreaded epidemics—anthrax or surra—which have been known to decimate a herd of working elephants in a few weeks.

Breakfast over, I set out on my eighty-mile trek which was to take a week—very good going, I thought, after my experiences in the boat. The pony-boy was my guide, but etiquette forbade him to ride in front of his master. So Smith had explained the words for right, left and straight on. When I reached a fork in the road I was to rein in, and let the "sais" direct me. It worked very well, except that I did not like to go out of a walk; judging by the way he sat his pony, I felt my companion would fall off if we attempted anything more ambitious. There was a curious dearth of horse-minded servants in the north of Thailand, so different from India or Burma, where your "sais" was probably born in a stable and could ride from the age of six.

I waved good-bye to Smith as he stood at the compound gateway, and we rode through the stink-

ing bazaar, whose shops or stalls were kept by Chinese, Indians, Burmese or Shans. Pariah curs yapped at our heels, a perpetual nuisance I had not yet learned to counteract by carrying a riding-crop or cut-down polo stick. We crossed a rickety wooden bridge over the Mewung, and were soon free of Lakon and its suburbs. An embanked road, similar to the one by which I had originally arrived, crossed a small rice-plain, and we were in the kind of deciduous forest known as "laterite" jungle from the reddish sandy soil in which it grows. The feature of this kind of forest is that the trees are comparatively dwarf in height, with thick, cork-like bark and enormous leaves. The country was flat, and the number of paths and tracks which intersected this apparently uninhabited wilderness was one of the surprise impressions of the jungle.

The day's march was typical of up-country travel. The scrub jungle had given way to dense bamboo when we caught up the elephants. Although they had had an hour's start, and I had not gone out of a walk, little more than half the day's journey had been completed. And now for the first time I was presented with the perennial problem of whether to keep behind the elephants or ride on ahead. Being new, I chose the former, which means still further cutting down the pony's pace and riding in a cloud of dust or stumbling in the elephants' muddy tracks according to the time of year. The elephants' pace is also much reduced as they have winded the ponies and keep turning their heads round to look at them, squeaking with alarm. They are as terrified of the ponies as the ponies are of them. Their squeaks and the slow pace keep the ponies on a perpetual dance; the coolies stop their songs and chatter in deference to "master's" presence; and everyone is uncomfortable.

On the other hand, if you go ahead of the elephants, you have first to pass them. This alone is a work of art, for no animal is easier to stampede. Very occasionally you might have the luck to come up with them on a grass plain or on rice-fields after the reaping, when the fences are down. But it is an almost invariable rule that you overtake them at the most awkward place imaginable. This is part of that general cussedness of jungle life that at times seems almost incarnate, like the jungle spirits which the natives dread so much. There seems to be, especially if one is ill or run down, some imponderable hostility, some implacable inertia that stultifies all one's efforts. One very senior man told me at the Christmas meeting, "My dear boy, *everything* in this country is against you!" That feeling, which we all sometimes got, of being thwarted at every turn, so preyed on his mind, poor chap, that he lost his reason.

But we have still not succeeded in passing the elephants, for we are considering this alternative to the course I actually took that first day. First of all you have to attract the attention of the "boy," who is technically in charge of the whole convoy in his master's absence. He is usually marching jauntily ahead of them, his white European topee worn at a rakish angle, his voice raised in some untranslatable love-song. Relays of shouts from the coolies and "mahouts" behind have at last brought him to earth, and he realises that "master" has arrived at the rear of the procession, and wishes to pass. If he is inexperienced, he will at once tell the elephant riders to stop and move aside, leaving us only a few yards of jungle track in which to manoeuvre. Then the fun begins. The elephants, trumpeting shrilly with fright, squeeze themselves sideways against the



trees; probably breaking the howdahs and shedding some of their contents. Or, as the ponies get nearer, they may even bolt, scattering all one's possessions over a square mile of jungle, and several hours may be wasted before they are caught again. As for the ponies, they dance sideways, back, rear up on their hindlegs, and show every kind of terror. If we are not unseated, we are almost sure to have our leg grazed against a tree-trunk or torn with thorns. The "sais" will certainly have come off, for he is but a fair-weather horseman. All this trouble can be caused by a "boy" who does not arrange our passing in the proper way.

The experienced "boy," on hearing the order, will carry on until he comes to an open glade or a spot where the track widens. Then he will tell the riders to back their elephants into the forest so that they can see the ponies coming all the way. He will have allowed the ponies at least twenty yards between them and the elephants. Even so there will be deep, nervous rumblings on the one side, and snorts of terror on the other. It is "touch and go" with all this room to spare, and certainly "go" with less.

Having passed through this almost daily crisis of jungle travel, we have left the elephants behind and are free to ride on to our camp site, or wait by the track side from time to time until we hear the elephant bells, which are hung round their necks, announcing their approach, then ride on again. Either way is uncomfortable. If you ride straight on to where the camp is to be pitched, there is nothing to do for perhaps a couple of hours but to stand or sit about waiting for the elephants. Sitting about is not such a simple affair as it sounds. Whether you lie on short grass or sit on a log, it is

not long before the insects have found you out. Biting ants or crawling sweat-bees or in the rainy season clouds of mosquitoes will make your waits, long or short, a misery. In fact, there is no such thing as a pleasant journey in the jungle. Your ten or twelve-mile daily stage will have cost you as much in dirt, discomfort and irritation as a thousand miles on a transcontinental railway.

These unpleasant facts are learnt by experience. For the moment travel is transfigured by the glamour of novelty. I ride behind the elephants for a couple of hours through bamboo jungle and occasional patches of rice cultivation until we arrive at the site of my first camp. We halt under the shade of some evergreen trees, and a chair is the first thing taken down from the howdahs for my special benefit. I sit down and watch a comfortable camp growing out of a collection of ill-assorted bundles.

The tent in which I am to spend what are generally called the best years of my life interests me most. It is really a double or two-fly tent, the outer fly projecting about six feet in front of the inner fly to form a verandah. In this front part are duly set out my long chair, table and table-chair. My camp-bed is set up in the inner fly. At the back of the tent is a small round annexe where my bath-tub and washing basin are placed. Over a foundation of canvas ground-sheets, a couple of Indian "dhurries" or fibre rugs form the floor. The whole effect pleases me; it is roomy and comfortable. I have not yet had time to regard this open-air dwelling-place as a green prison whose impalpable bars are shutting me out from all the interest and action and romance of the world I have left behind me.

After my green canvas tent has been set up and furnished a single outer fly houses my cook and "boy" and a black tarpaulin the "mahouts" and coolies. Another outer fly is converted by means of a bamboo partition into loose boxes for the ponies and a bed for the "sais". The camp is now complete, and "tiffin" or lunch is served. As we are only a day from the Lakon bazaar, there is still meat on the menu. We have not yet descended to the eternal chicken!

The first day's march is repeated with one variation for the rest of a week. The exception is the day on which my "boy" announces there is a convenient temple to camp in. I have already been told that the Lord Buddha extends his hospitality to high and low alike. The difference between the high (myself) and humbler folk is that I am allowed to camp in the "viharn" or main temple, while they must be content with the "sala"—open rest-house or cloisters which surround the temple courtyard.

It is a good idea of the "boy's." It saves him the trouble of putting up tents, and gives me a new experience. The temple is called Wat Namcho, and is built on a raised knoll on the terraced paddy-fields, which slope gently away from it. Seated on a camp-chair at the entrance of the temple, there is a fine view of the whole little valley, with its green rice-fields and village nestling among coco-nut and betel palms.

The head priest, as soon as tiffin is over, comes up to ask me if I am comfortable. After that I am left in peace until the hour of evensong. At dusk two or three priests and a dozen acolytes come in and prostrate themselves before the altar, above

which a more than life-size image of Buddha smiles benignly down on them. Then they start intoning prayers at an incredible speed. The droning whine jabbers up in a crescendo and dies away again. I am told they do not understand a word of it, for it is all in the ancient Pali, that came from India centuries ago. It is as if Irish peasants were praying in mediæval dog-Latin, and hoping for the best. The intonation ended, they pray for a minute in silence, salute the Buddha, and steal quietly away. Their yellow robes as they file out are the last touch of colour in the gathering dusk. Then the "boy" comes in and lights my hurricane lamp.

On the eighth day I arrive at Ban Mai, the headquarters of Muang Wung forest. Set in the middle of a grass lawn, which is bounded on three sides by a hedge of hybiscus, on the fourth, sloping down to the river, stands a wooden bungalow of a type with which I was to become familiar. The roof is of thatch, the walls of plaited bamboo, and the floor of jungle-wood planks. The whole is built on stout wooden piles. A front verandah runs the breadth of the building. At each end is an enclosed bedroom, and the open space in the middle between the two bedrooms forms the dining-room. Opening out of each bedroom is a tiny bathroom containing a galvanised iron tub and a tall stone water-jar. The "usual offices" are at the bottom of the garden.

The ground floor or space underneath the bungalow was boarded up to form an office and a storeroom. Most forests had at least one of these "shacks," and after weeks in a tent, especially in the rains, it was a relief to have a roof over one's head for a few days while doing headquarters accounts or writing one's monthly report. The trouble about these jungle bungalows was that being infre-

quently lived in they are apt to become damp, and, unless one had a good caretaker, full of insects. The scorpion and mason-bee, in particular, infested them, and I have known their bedrooms contain a swarm of honey-bees or a flight of bats.

The caretaker of these jungle bungalows was usually dignified by the name of clerk. He was responsible for all the rice and paddy stored in the godowns for issue to the girdling or elephant camps by means of the Company's bullock caravans. He is also in charge of the stores—the dozens of pairs of elephant dragging-chains, tying-chains, hobbles, axes, spades, pickaxes, saws, and every form of tool used in the working of teak. His position as a buffer between the white man in charge of the forest and the local villagers is a delicate one. To refuse an occasional basket of rice to a friend would be churlish, yet if his defalcations are discovered he gets the sack. But if his loyalty to his employers becomes too irksome to his native friends, there is a genuine risk that his own sleeping quarters, if not the bungalow and godown, may be involved in a mysterious fire! But in spite of these disadvantages in his job, many a jungle headquarters clerk was able to satisfy both sides, and still collect a tidy "nest-egg" for himself!

The elephants were driven up to the verandah railing of the bungalow, the "boys" and coolies stood behind the railing to receive the kit, while the riders laboriously dragged everything out of the howdahs, bumped it on to the elephant's forehead, from which it was hoisted over the railings and carried into the room I was to occupy. The elephants were remarkably good in standing quite still while the unloading was in progress. A sudden movement of their heads would have meant that whatever was being handled at the

moment would crash seven feet to the ground.

While the unloading was going on, up came Brown, the firm's champion "girdler," who was to teach me the work, and we shook hands. He was tall and inclined to baldness, and compared to Ellis and Smith I found him rather cold and reserved. But when, in years to come, I myself had to take charge of new arrivals, I realised what a nuisance they can be and how necessary it is, at any rate until they have improved on acquaintance, to keep them at arm's length. The endless questions, the constant need of interpretation, the futile grumblings and nervous irritability of a "greenhorn" in the tropics are not rendered any the less irksome by the knowledge in the process of acclimatisation, he is almost certain to go sick on you, and you will have to add the duties of doctor and nurse to your rôle of guide, philosopher and friend. So I no longer blame Brown for his cold reception of me, for he turned out subsequently to be a most amusing companion in his dry and cynical way.

It was arranged we should start for girdling camp next day. Brown had just engaged a couple of dozen of new Kamus, just down from French Indo-China, as girdling coolies, and used them as carriers instead of his transport elephants, which he sent to help in a timber camp. We crossed the little Muang Wung rice-plain and were soon amongst the jungle paths of the foothills. Then we came to a fairly large stream, and started to follow up its course. We crossed and re-crossed it a score of times, while the hills gradually closed in on us until there was no possible track but the bed of the stream. Soon we began to encounter small waterfalls, up which the elephants clambered, grunting in disapproval. We dismounted and sent our ponies back to headquarters

at Ban Mai, for the going was now impossible for them. It was to be foot-slogging from now on. The hills rose almost sheer from the banks of the stream, which finally divided into two. Between the two branches was a small level piece of ground, just large enough to contain our camp. This was the only possible base from which to explore the stream's head-waters, said Brown, for above it the country was too steep and rocky for a camp.

Our tents were pitched, and we had lunch. In the afternoon Brown took me up the hillside, on and on until we reached the top of a main ridge from which we could get a good idea of the configuration of the valley in which our camp lay, and explained the whole process of girdling. In its most literal sense, girdling is just the process of ring-barking a teak tree which causes it to die, shedding its leaves and in time sloughing off its bark. Two years after being girdled, the tree is fit to fell, being dry and floatable and much reduced in weight. But the term girdling is used in a wider sense to mean the actual search for and finding of the girdleable teak, that is, all trees which have a girth of seven feet measured five feet from the ground. All forest concessions are watersheds, that is, all the area which drains into a certain river. Girdling is the first operation undertaken in a new forest lease such as Muang Wung, and it involves the exploration of the whole of the drainage in order that every available tree may be girdled. This particular lease was about the top forty miles of the Mewung river, and its valley varied from fifteen to twenty miles in breadth. So there was no less than six hundred square miles to be covered by Brown and myself. Actually girdling had been going on for about two years, but there was still plenty of unexplored jungle awaiting me.

The Mewung had numbers of large tributaries, such as the one in which we were now camped, and the procedure in girdling one of these streams was to start on one bank at its mouth or junction with Mewung, work your way up that bank and round the stream's headwaters and down the other bank until you arrived at its mouth again exactly opposite to where you started. The strict rule of girdling was that you must never cross a tributary stream of any kind, however small, because by so doing you will have left some ground unquartered. But it is a geographical fact in hilly areas such as these that by following every little feeder round its sources the whole country is eventually covered.

Brown had already girdled the stream we were in up to the mouth of the right fork, and next day took me with him to continue the work. We started at half-past seven, Brown leading the way, me next, followed by some twenty Kamus carrying girdling axes. Brown claimed straight up the hillside at a good pace, and I followed him as best I could, for he was in hill-training and I was not. I feel sure he put on the pace a bit, both to impress me and to see what stuff I was made of. Climbing up a sheer hillside of loose shale is agony to the uninitiated, and I was soon short of breath. The action, I thought even then, was like that of a treadmill: you must keep on moving up or you will slide down. After about a quarter of an hour my heart was pounding in my chest, my ears were drumming and there was a mist before my eyes. I was just about at the end of my first wind when, thank God, Brown struck the first girdleable tree of the day, and there was a blessed respite of several minutes while a coolie cut a blaze and hammered a number on it, while Brown entered the number and girth in his note-book. We



left two Kamus behind to do the ring-barking, and set off again.

The next tree was found after another stiff climb almost on the top of the ridge, the one after that right down at the foot of the hill, almost on the banks of the stream. Brown was very footsure, but I found the greatest difficulty in keeping my balance when going along the side of or down the hill. The sun was well up by now, and the heat to me almost intolerable, yet we climbed up and down that hillside with only occasional pauses when we had found a girdleable tree up to midday, by which time I was frankly exhausted. We had passed through several plantations of young teak, but trees of the proper girth were scarce, thus reducing the number of halts. Added to this, I found the unaccustomed undergrowth; often breast high, very difficult to push my way through, and had not yet acquired the instinct of avoiding thorns and stinging creepers. Altogether I was delighted when Brown called the midday halt, and blew a blast on his whistle to guide the coolies carrying our tiffin to us; they had been roughly following our progress from the top of the main ridge.

I was absolutely soaked with sweat, but, being new to the game, had not brought along a change of shirt or shorts. As we waited in the shade of a large tree for the tiffin-carriers I felt chilly and uncomfortable, but still pleasantly hungry. At last my coolie arrived in the wake of Brown's and unpacked an unappetising meal of cold clammy chicken rissoles and cold dry boiled chicken. The seeds of fever and indigestion are being sown as I shiver and gulp the food and wash it down with a deep draught of water that has been boiled and filtered and tastes strongly of both processes. Then I light a cigarette, the only

luxury of the day, and after half an hour's rest, by which time I am cold and stiff, the indefatigable Brown leads off again.

I shall never forget that first day's girdling as long as I live, nor my horror, as I realised that this was the normal routine work for months, perhaps years. Brown, for instance, had been doing practically nothing else but girdling since he came back from home leave two years ago. It was sheer hard labour, and even in a temperate climate would demand a high degree of physical fitness and mental determination. It is true that there are no set hours, but everyone is expected to keep on till late afternoon. Besides, without long hours you cannot get results, and without results you are obviously lazy or incompetent. Also, there is nothing else to do but sit and brood in your tent. However, it was not many days before I had got into training, and soon, when girdling, "on my own," I was actually enjoying the work. All the same I feel sure that girdling is an occupation that no Trades Union in Europe would allow its members to undertake!

I had a week's training with Brown on the big right-bank tributary. Each morning we splashed up the bed of the stream whose various bends and waterfalls were becoming as familiar as some street in a home town, until we reached the point where we had come down from the hillside the day before, then up we climbed. Teak was still scarce, and we were not getting much more than thirty trees a day. Meanwhile, a mail had come in from Lakon, and with it a letter from Smith to Brown telling him that one of our girdlers in Chiangmai district was averaging sixty trees a day. This was part of the usual manager's plan of fostering a spirit of inter-station rivalry, the spirit of "the old school tie."

But I had already realised that the better one did at girdling the more chance one had of being transferred to ordinary forest work, which might be just as hard, but would certainly be less monotonous. There was thus every incentive to put up a good performance on "the treadmill."

As we worked our way towards the headwaters of this right-bank tributary the hills became steeper and steeper until we reached a formation of limestone cliffs on top of which was a plateau which Brown christened. "The Lost World." Unfortunately for us, we could see teak growing on these heights, which meant that somehow we should have to scale them. I suggested to Brown that as it would be impossible to extract logs from such a place there was little use in girdling the trees. Brown was furious, and bluntly told me that if I was afraid of rock-climbing, I could sit at the bottom of the cliffs and wait for him, for he was certainly going up. I apologised and said I fully intended to come with him, and, somewhat mollified, he explained that we would be almost sure to find a way round by which elephants could get up, for they are marvellous climbers, at their own pace. If the place was impossible for elephants, the logs might be worked by hand with block and tackle. In any case, we must find a way up, if only to see how many trees there were.

Our Kamu coolies could climb like monkeys, but they were unanimous in telling Brown that any attempt to get up the cliff face was impossible. So we spent the rest of that day and most of the next in skirting the base of the plateau, and working our way behind it. It was terribly hard going, for the undergrowth was more than six feet high, and the ground was littered with sharp boulders. Finally we found, at the rear of the plateau, a break in the

limestone cliffs through which a gradually ascending crevasse of loose shale, choked with rank vegetation, led up sufficiently near to the top of the plateau for us to push and haul each other up. "The Lost World" proved to be about a mile long by a few hundred yards in breadth, and we girdled over forty magnificent trees. Brown said this was typical of the way the best teak grew in the most difficult places. Anyhow, we had done our job, and it was for posterity to extract the trees when the time came to work the forest. Brown thought that the narrow pass we had come up by might possibly be blasted wide enough to make an elephant drag-path.

Before finding our way back, we stood for a few minutes on the top of the cliffs looking down on the Mewung valley. Brown's aneroid showed we were nearly four thousand feet above sea-level. Beyond the green ribbon of the Mewung rice-plain rose range upon range of densely wooded hills stretching right away to the mighty ranges of the wild Salween. The plateau seemed devoid of life, until the eerie silence was broken by the loud croak of a giant hornbill which had just sighted us from the top of a dead pine. It was time to get back to camp if we were to make it in daylight.

At last Brown considers me sufficiently trained to start work on my own, and assigns me the left-bank tributary, which I am to work up towards its headwaters until eventually we both meet, somewhere in the country between the two streams. I start off on my first morning secretly determined to get more trees than Brown. I know this is a bold resolution, but perhaps by working a little later than usual I can manage it. I find my new area just as steep and difficult as the other stream, and teak just as scarce. By tiffin-time I have only girdled twenty-five trees.

So I cut short my rest after tiffin, and struggle on through the heat of the afternoon. Without knowing it, I am getting far afield, and as I give the order to go on and on I see the coolies looking tired and sullen. At last one of them gives me to understand that unless we turn back now, it will be dark by the time we reach camp. But I still need five more trees to total forty, so we carry on for another half-hour, then slither down the hillside into the bed of the stream. By following it down we cannot at any rate get lost.

Up on the slopes the light was beginning to fail, and here at the bottom of the valley it is nearly dark. The coolies are muttering and grumbling, for they hate being in the forest after nightfall. It is not so much the wild beasts as the jungle spirits that they fear. Soon they all stop and start cutting down dry bamboos. The temperature has fallen with a rush. I am shivering and pretty well spent as I sit on a rock and wait while they bind the bamboos into giant torches and light them. Our progress down the bed of the stream is slow: waterfalls that would be treacherous in daylight are dangerous now. I slide and slip and curse as I get bruise after bruise through stumbling over wet boulders. It is seven-thirty, a good hour after dark, before we reach camp. Brown is bathed and changed and having dinner.

"Got lost?" he enquires sarcastically.

"No," I reply, "I just carried on a bit late in order to get a total of forty."

"Good Lord," he laughs, "I got fifty-two!"

I stumble over to my tent, and shout for a bath, indignantly refusing the whisky-and-soda my "boy" had got ready for me. At that hour and in my state

it would have been the best medicine in the world. But one has to find these things out. Next day I was down with my first bout of fever.

## CHAPTER VI

### CHRISTMAS MEETING

I awoke with a buzzing, blinding headache, and began to dress. I sat down to breakfast aching all over, and could not eat. Suddenly I was seized with ague. I dashed back to my tent. Shivering in every limb and with teeth chattering, I pulled off my boots and puttees, and flung myself into bed. Soon Brown came along, spotted what was the matter, and told me what to do.

"Pile on all the bedclothes you've got, until you begin to sweat. As soon as you've got into a really muck sweat, call the 'boy'. Change all your clothes, get into a long chair and take fifteen grains of quinine. Get the 'boy' to change your bedclothes, and then get back to bed. I'm off to the girdling. So long!"

Waiting for that sweat to come was agony. The ague passed, but the aching increased and I began to burn all over. As the hours went by I got hotter and more stifled until it was all I could do to restrain myself from throwing off all the clothes to get cool again. The camp-bed was insufferably hard and uncomfortable and I could not sleep. At last there was a prickling sensation in the small of the back. The blessed perspiration had come. Soon my brow was beaded, next my face was streaming, I was wet through. Insensibly the aches and pains had passed. I called for the "boy," changed, and sank into a long chair. I was comfortable, free from

pain, but weak as a kitten. I called for a cup of tea after taking the quinine, and enjoyed it.

The fever returned in the evening, and for three days I could not shake it off. The process of "sweating it out" was continued, and the doses increased till I was taking thirty grains of quinine at a time. This made my head buzz and made me temporarily deaf, but eventually did the trick. When the fever finally left me, I was too weak to walk, so stayed in camp for five or six days. I soon exhausted all Brown's and my own reading material, but fortunately had my Siamese grammar and dictionary to work at. By this time Brown had finished off the two headwater tributaries, and we had moved camp lower down the stream, where the country was easier and teak a little more plentiful.

Meantime my Chinese cook had fallen ill and his coolie was cooking for me. I suppose it was the bad and dirtily cooked food produced by this Kamu, or just part of the process of acclimatisation, but my stomach turned on me next. I had been back at the girdling for about a week, and was getting fifty or sixty trees a day, when suddenly one morning just after starting out from camp I was attacked by acute indigestion—my first experience since childhood. I had violent diarrhoea and was frequently sick, and sometimes these two symptoms were simultaneous, as in cholera. Needless to say, this laid me out as quickly as had the malaria. Once more I was confined to camp, and cured by a starvation diet of tinned milk and biscuits. A camp makes good sleeping quarters, but as a place to spend the whole day in is gloomy and oppressive. The forest seems to be closing in on one, especially towards nightfall. How I used to long for Brown's return in the evening. As often as not he would arrive back tired and



irritable, and go straight to bed after dinner. But I was alone no longer. This convalescence lasted about a week, and after a few more days' girdling we were due to start down to Lakon for the Christmas meeting.

Gradually and almost imperceptibly, the so-called "cold weather" had come upon us, and most grateful it was after the steamy heat of the ending of the rains. The term, of course is only comparative, for at midday the temperature would be eighty in the shade. But by midnight it had fallen to forty, and even from sunset onwards was so cold by comparison with the day that we wore woollen cardigans and tweed coats after our evening bath, and had dinner in front of a roaring log fire. The early morning was just as cold and generally misty, and we would start out as thickly clothed as in late autumn at home. Then, as the sun got up, we would shed layer after layer of clothes, until by midday we were left with jungle shirt and shorts as usual.

How I enjoyed that first and every subsequent cold weather! For nearly three months, depending on the latitude, one could be reasonably cool for all but the middle hours of the day, and even then it was cool in the shade. December, January and part of February were the normal cold weather months, and this was always the time chosen for visits of inspection from Directors from home. Elaborate preparations ensured that all their journeys up-country were smooth and comfortable, they were royally entertained when in station, and left for home under the impression that we were all enjoying a marvellous open-air life in an ideal climate!

In this kind of weather Brown and I had quite a good journey down, and on the seventh day after

leaving Ban Mai were crossing the Lakon rice-plain. In the distance we could already see the gilded spires of the city's pagodas. Soon we were approaching the crumbling city walls, built of red brick that had mellowed through the centuries to pink or mauve according to the height of the sun. Passing through a ruined gateway, we were in the city and passing through its crowded bazaar. It is difficult to recall the feeling now, but I remember I was thrilled with excitement. Here was a small, insanitary, dusty up-country town, housing normally not more than a dozen Europeans, yet after two months in the jungle it seemed like London, Paris and New York rolled into one! And I had not even been alone!

We rode into the office compound, were greeted by Smith, and taken straight over to his bungalow. According to time-honoured custom, he opened a bottle of champagne. This was the station manager's traditional greeting to his returned "jungle-wallahs," and all helped to put up the cost of living in a big station. It was the first of many bottles of "fizz" I saw opened that Christmas, and there is no doubt that the men did themselves very proud on their rare visits to station. It was all part of the reaction to loneliness in the forest life. But unfortunately, this habit of high living was apt to extend to the period of home leave, and men would live in town for six months at the rate of two or three thousand a year. They would return to Thailand with a "debit balance" which perhaps would only just have been paid off by the time next leave was due. Finally, they would leave the service with only the compulsory savings of their Provident Fund (for which ten per cent. of pay was deducted monthly and ten per cent. added by the firm), bringing in only a few hundreds a year.

We finished the bottle, returned to our quarters for a bath and tiffin and after a siesta went down to the club. Lakon was filling up, and by Christmas Eve there were over forty jungle men from all over the north in station, which was practically the entire white population except for American missionaries. All spare room accommodation in the various teak firms' compounds was full, several pitched tents in the gardens, while there was quite an encampment at the club.

Next day there were some trial chukkers of polo in preparation for the inter-station tournament, and I had my first game. I had ridden from childhood but knew nothing about polo. I soon discovered however that Rajah, the old pony I had bought from Smith, was an adept at the game, could turn on a penny piece and gave me every opportunity of hitting the ball, which I sometimes did! Rajah's best effort was when one of our firm from another station, who rather fancied himself at polo, had got almost clean away and appeared certain to score a goal. Without any prompting from me Rajah had whipped round, caught him, and ridden him right off the line of the ball, which another player on my side was able to back-hand into safety. As we came off the field at the end of the chukker, a "burra-sahib" from another firm congratulated me on saving a certain goal in my first game of polo, but the man I had ridden of looked anything but pleased.

After the games were over there was some heavy drinking, as drinks were "free" for the duration of the meeting, which meant that we were each debited with our share at the end of it. After my previous experience I kept clear of the "shorts." There were several tables of bridge, one of which I was asked to join. Fortunately the stakes were small, for,

outside up-country Thailand, I have never seen a more fantastic travesty of a card game anywhere. Nobody cheated, but that was about the only fault absent from the table. Conversation never ceased, players led out of turn, every card played was greeted with facetious comment, and revokes were as frequent as interruptions for rounds of drinks. When the scores came to be added up, there was little resemblance between the results, and a good deal of compromise preceded the final agreement!

I soon found this Christmas meeting was a wild orgy, an endless "binge," a real "alcoholiday." Most of the men were really abstemious in the jungle, and the reaction after months of loneliness, the excitement of meeting your fellow-men and talking and hearing your own language, went to the head and was expressed in a boundless hospitality that lasted all day and most of the night.

Nobody left the club much before nine o'clock, and formal and informal dinner-parties took place every night. The "burra-sahibs" or managers, most of whom came down to the club in smart little pony-traps with uniformed "sais" on the back seat, were rather inclined to keep to themselves except on big occasions. A party of drunken juniors would turn on the gramophone after dinner and dance with each other for hours. When they were no longer capable of dancing, there would be a "sing-song," most of the songs being unprintable and many of them uncomplimentary to those in authority. One of them parodied a well-known "aria" as follows:

It's the sime the 'ole world over—  
Isn't it a bloody shime?  
It's the rich wot tikes their pleshers  
And the poor wot gits the blime.

See the blasted burra-sahibs  
In their gigs they proudly sit  
While the wretched jungle-wallahs  
Stumble home through slime and grit.

It was a fact that most of the juniors elected to walk home from the club in the evening, knowing from experience that they were quite incapable of sitting a pony!

Unfortunately for me, I elected to ride Rajah to a dinner-party given by another firm not far away. My arrival was unnoticed, but when the time came to go home a "rigger" scrum was going on in the middle of the lawn, and an ex-Welsh-international scrum-half was just putting the ball (an opera hat) into the scrum. As he caught sight of me trotting past, he yelled, "Here come the bloody Sassenach forwards!" and before I knew what had happened he had collared Rajah low! How the Welshman escaped injury was a miracle, but he hadn't a scratch on him. I was not so lucky. We were both flung to the ground, and as Rajah struggled to his feet one of his hoofs scraped down my shin-bone from knee to instep. A bruise on the shin-bone is painful, but to have the entire shin one long bruise is agony! Needless to say that in spite of my potations I got little sleep that night.

It was at a smaller dinner-party that I caught my first glimpse of the private lives of the "teak-wallahs." I had been invited to the junior mess of another firm who were housed in a barrack-like building which had several bed-rooms opening on to a long verandah. I had arrived too early, and my hosts were still changing. In front of three of the bedrooms sat a Lao girl, with powdered face and dressed in the most expensive lace bodice and silk

"sin" (skirt). They were glaring at each other without speaking a word, but as I appeared at the top of the stairs each broke into a self-conscious simper. At that moment a door opened and a man came out of his bedroom.

"Hey, get out of this!" he shouted, and the three girls disappeared giggling down the passage to the servants' quarters.

"Sorry, Williams," he said. "These polls do love to show themselves off. I expect you'll be taking one on soon, eh? Keep 'em in their place, that's my motto."

The same man, much later in the evening, took me aside just as I was rising to go.

"I say, W., if at any time you want to take on a girl, let me know. My girl has a sister, a pretty little thing of sixteen, and a pukka virgin. As such, she would cost you one hundred rupees down, and twenty-five rupees a month wages. You're bound to come to it sooner or later—everyone does, you know."

"I bet you a fiver I never do!" I retorted hotly.

"My dear boy, I wouldn't take your money," he laughed.

"Good night!"

In course of time I discovered that he was right. Practically every man had his "girl" or more vulgarly "poll," and some of the "burra-sahibs," whom I should never have suspected of relations with native women, had quite large black-and-tan families. There was some justification for their mode of life, including the firms' ban on marriage, subsequently relaxed. A casual affair was quite rightly considered highly

dangerous, as well as being beneath the dignity of a white man. To keep one's own mistress was the only solution of this problem of sex.

The cynical Brown was sitting up by himself having a last whisky when I got back to our mess. He had been to another party which was evidently quite a good one. When I told him what I had seen at the other mess, and of my bet, he laughed and said :

"You be wise, my boy, and try and stick to your resolution. These girls sound cheap enough on paper, a hundred 'dibs' down, and twenty-five a month (less than you pay your cook), but believe me, you will have spent as much in the end as if you had hired a white 'tart' to come out from home. These girls are damned good at wheedling. After a bit the wages aren't enough (to do the girls justice, I believe their parents pinch most of it): then she must keep a servant—at your expense, of course. Then she'll want expensive clothes to keep up the high social position of being your poll! Next, she'll want jewellery because Blank's poll has got it. You wouldn't believe what some of these fellows spend on the wenches. They get all sentimental and chivalrous-like about them, instead of regarding them as a bloody but necessary nuisance!

"I assure you that quite a few chaps are absolutely under their girl's thumb. They give in to their every whim, lend their people money, build them teak houses, buy them paddy-fields and then, when they go home for good (if they can afford to!) leave them a parting present of five or ten thousand rupees. And all this quite apart from the question of children. These girls though they know more about prevention than most people, always try to

have a kid as soon as possible, as they think it gives them a hold on you. Then the kids must be clothed and fed and educated. Why, some of these chaps even send them to school in Europe. So you watch it, my boy, or you'll find yourself a not-so-proud father in no time !"

I thanked Brown for his good advice, and turned in. I concluded that he was one of the few who had kept himself "pure," and that was a possible cause of his cynicism and irritability.

There were no English women up-country in those days, but several of the American missionaries were married, and their wives used to turn up in their best frocks to watch the inter-station and inter-interest polo matches. To a male eye their "kit" was smart and their hats quite coquettish, but this view might have been due to lack of standards of comparison. These Christmas meetings were almost the only occasions when one really saw anything of them issionaries, and they certainly took the social life of the station quite seriously

Towards the end of the fortnight's meeting, one of the senior missionaries' wives gave quite a big dinner-party, to which Brown and I were invited. Knowing that water would be the only beverage offered, several of the party of "jungle-wallahs" had "ginned up" at the club beforehand, and some had quite evidently overdone it. After dinner we played "parlour games" of the pencil-and-paper, educational variety. A "boy" brought a large stone water carafe with a tray of glasses, and put it on a table in the dimly lit verandah outside, for anyone to go out and help themselves when thirsty. By this time the primed-up ones had sobered down and felt dejected, while the others, in full alcoholic training after all



these parties, were beginning to moisten their lips and look at their wrist-watches. Suddenly Brown asked our hostess if he could go out to the verandah for a drink, and returned after an appreciable interval looking more cheerful. He then suggested to one of the "hot" members of the party that he should try the water-jar. The other one blushed and gulped, but something in Brown's tone decided him. He went out and presently returned beaming. At intervals we all followed his example, and when my turn came I found the water-jar contained at least fifty per cent. whisky!

How thoughtful and tactful of our hostess, I thought. Debarred, if not by her own conscience, at least by the presence of other missionaries from providing alcohol openly, she had worked it this way. The evening ended better than it ever seemed likely to at first, and all went well until one of the male missionaries visited the verandah. He came back coughing and spluttering, with an expression on his face I shall never forget. Brown hastily gave a signal, and all we "jungle-wallahs" got up to go. On the way home I said to Brown how awfully decent it was of Mrs. X to provide liquor for us that way. Brown roared with laughter.

"I put a full flask in that jar myself."

That night Brown and I sat up talking about missionaries. His own views were characteristic.

-- "Missionary effort in a country like this is a waste of time and money. Buddhism itself is merely a Far Eastern form of Christianity, just as Moham-medanism is a Near Eastern form. I bet you these missionaries haven't a single genuine convert to show for all the years they have been working here. Their so-called followers are out for what they can get—not

quite 'rice Christians' like the Chinese, for there is no real destitution here—but definitely regarding Christianity as a commercial proposition. The missionaries completely spoil them. No one of us would dream of taking on a mission-trained cook or 'boy,' though several 'girls' are Christians!"

"But don't they do any good at all?"

"Oh, yes. Their schools are fine, and their hospitals wonderful, a boon to the Siamese Government and to ourselves. If it wasn't for missionaries there wouldn't be a single white doctor up-country."

Then he told me the story of the almost incredible ride, on relays of native ponies, in the middle of the rainy season, of a plucky American doctor who had received an urgent call to attend a colleague over a hundred miles away. He arrived in a little under the twelve hours!

All missionaries received an intensive training in the vernacular before they were allowed to start "proselytising." Even so, the language made their work very difficult. The Bible had been laboriously translated into Siamese and Lao, correctly but literally. For instance, a phrase like "The Lamb of God" was quite meaningless in a country where sheep were practically unknown. Nor had the Siamese as a race any of the mysticism to which symbolic language might appeal. I often wondered whether Brown was right. I was sure, at any rate in after years, that many of the old Buddhist priests were really holy men. As for the rank and file, a good Buddhist was certainly better than a bad Christian.

The American attitude to the natives was undoubtedly a Christian one. The better-class families were treated as equals, and the Lao chiefs

and Siamese officials with deference. At one polo match I saw an American lady get up and fetch a chair for a Siamese judge who had just arrived to watch the game! He was a "Pra" (Lord), but this was an official title that need not amount to the status of an O.B.E. at home. Yet he was treated with more respect by this good lady than the literal translation of his rank might warrant. It seemed to me then, and afterwards when I visited the Philippines, that the American treatment of coloured people varied immensely if that colour was the result of the Asiatic rather than the African sun!

The most picturesque function of the whole Christmas meeting was a reception given to the foreign community by the Lao ruling Chief of Lakon. Northern Thailand was, within living memory, divided into a series of Lao states each ruled by an independent Chao or Chief who had the power of life and death over his subjects as well as being the personal owner of all his territory, though he acknowledged the King of Thailand as suzerain. One of the Chief's most valuable perquisites was the royalty paid him by the British firms on all the teak worked from his forests. At the beginning of this century the Siamese Government was gradually taking over the administration of the whole country. In return for the forest royalties, the Lao chiefs were given the rank of General in the newly formed Provincial Gendarmerie and paid a salary of about £ 20,000 a year. All their rights were now vested in the central government. But in the eyes of their own people the Lao chiefs had lost very little of their power and prestige. The tactful presence of a Siamese High Commissioner in each Lao state was scarcely noticed by the local population.

The reception given by the Chao Luang (Heredit-

ary Chief) had thus lost nothing of its ancient ceremonial. It coincided with a Lao festival, and the huge compound which surrounded the palace was thrown open to the public. Hundreds of kerosene lamps illuminated the booths and bazaar stalls where cakes and sweetmeats, coloured drinks, t̄ea, coffee and even native liquor were on sale. Our contingent from the L. B. Teak Company, a dozen strong, rode through the packed streets dressed in white duck suits complete with the unaccustomed tie. We dismounted at the palace gates and gave our ponies to the "sais̄s." Then we walked through the curious crowds till we reached the staircase which led up to a large circular verandah. At the far end sat the Chao Luang (Very Big Chief) on a lacquer throne. He was a shortish man in the middle sixties, with close-cropped grey hair and a clipped moustache, the latter being a rarity amongst the Siamese and Laos. He wore the full-dress uniform of a General of the Provincial Gendarmerie, with the insignia of the Orders of The White Elephant and The Crown of Siam. There was a dignity in his bearing befitting one whose ancestry went back farther than that of the Chakri dynasty in Bangkok, founded by a successful revolutionary General. On his right were seated the Siamese High Commissioner, the Siamese Chief Judge, and the minor Lao chiefs. On his left the places of honour were given to the American lady missionaries who had arrived before us, and with whom His Highness was conversing affably.

The Danish Major of Gendarmerie, a good-natured giant with a red face wreathed in smiles, acted as deputy host and introduced us one by one to the Chief, with whom we shook hands, bowed, and took our seats round the circular verandah. In the middle was a table loaded with glasses and

bottles of champagne, which half a dozen servants were dispensing to the guests. The Chief was good-humouredly rallying the lady missionaries on their polite refusal of the champagne, assuring them that it would be good for them in more ways than one! Within half an hour all the foreign guests had arrived and received refreshment, and an adjournment was made to a large open hall on another side of the palace, which was in full view of the crowds outside.

Rows of chairs had been placed in readiness. The Chief and his principal guests were in the front row facing an open space on one side of which a native orchestra had begun to play. Their instruments included a kind of xylophone, flutes, tom-toms and gongs. The music, not unpleasing in a barbaric rhythm, rose to a crescendo, and in came the Chief's own troupe of dancing girls. There were about thirty of them, and their ages varied apparently from about sixteen to twenty-four. Each one was the old man's personal property, and they had been chosen by his agents or offered by their parents on the promise of their good looks from childhood. The state of concubinage did not appear to detract from the obvious pleasure they took in their performance nor from the more subtly concealed interest they took in the male members of the audience.

Their faces were powdered dead white, which is the Siamese criterion of beauty and enables us Europeans to start with an initial advantage in their estimation, which, however, is usually offset by our irregular features, long noses, blue eyes or some such cardinal fault! The girls' headdress was a close-fitting jewel-encrusted cap from the centre of which rose a tapering gilded spire, like that of a temple pagoda in miniature. Incidentally, the headdress on images of the Buddha, and the royal crown of Thailand

are of similar shape. The dancers wore close-fitting bodices with long sleeves, which were covered with gold and silver thread worked into patterns. Jewelled epaulettes on their shoulders curved upwards like inverted leaves. Their skirts were of gold-threaded silk, their feet bare, with anklets of gold or silver.

As they danced they sang, a whining nasal drone unutterably dreary and monotonous. But their movements were full of grace as they swayed this way and that, wreathing their arms and weaving patterns in the air, while they beat time with the ball of the foot. Sometimes they would glide round the hall in single file, to represent a journey, at others they would divide into two sections and sing at each other, to represent a battle. The whole ballet was absolutely formal and conventional and, to the native mind, classical. But to us the hour and a half the performance lasted was fully an hour too long, chiefly because of the repetition.

At last the girls salaamed their way out, and the old Chief led the way back to the reception verandah, where whisky-and-soda was served. Then we took our leave and rode back through the moon-lit streets, scented with frangipani from the temple compounds, feeling we had seen something of Old Siam.

## CHAPTER VII

### LOST IN THE JUNGLE

THE Christmas meeting is over. Brown stays behind a few more days in Lakon, while I start up alone for Muang Wung, to girdle a large tributary called Mesong, which Brown thinks will produce nearly twenty thousand trees. This is the best part of the year's work, but I am allowed to come down to Lakon for a week after three months. This is the usual length of a jungle trip, but for me it will be my first long spell alone, and I do not look forward to it! However, this fear of loneliness has got to be conquered, and that can only be done by hard work in the daytime and plenty to read at night. I have realised the latter point at last, and in my kit is a whole suitcase full of novels taken from the local library (run by the Mission) and borrowed from our mess.

I enjoy the journey up to Muang Wung, as the mornings are quite cool up to nearly midday. Though only a jungle track, this is one of the main roads to the northern rice plains, and we meet quite a lot of traffic. Bullock caravans predominate, and a more primitive or insecure mode of transport it would be difficult to imagine. The transport bulls are no bigger than donkeys, and the two large panniers they carry are literally balanced on them, as they have no girths, but only crupper and breast-band. From each bullock's neck hangs a very musical bell, and the leaders and every fifth or sixth

animal carry gongs above their saddles which swing and give note with their gait. A bullock caravan can thus be heard nearly a mile away, and its noise would effectually scare away any tiger or panther lurking by the roadside. The bells also guide the herdsmen when the bulls are let loose to graze.

The pace of a bullock caravan is not much faster than that of an elephant, and outside the rainy season they travel in a cloud of dust. The bulls are just as easily stampeded as elephants, and the result is chaos indescribable. When startled by a yapping cur or an oncoming pony, the bulls buck straight up in the air to free themselves of their load, though they generally manage to catch a foot in the gear and bring themselves down, and dash madly into the jungle, shedding rice or paddy over acres of ground, while the main road looks like a battlefield. The herdsmen rush madly about, screaming curses or sobbing oaths, and it will be hours before the cavalcade is on the march again, minus a lot of its freight. Only the amazing patience of an Eastern race could put up with such a form of transport.

Similar but much faster and more efficient are the Yunnanese mule caravans that come down from South China into Burma and Thailand to hire themselves out as transport in the cold weather. Their sturdy little eleven-hand ponies or mules can cover twenty miles a day against the bullock caravan's eight or nine. But the Yunnanese muleteers are very independent, and you cannot make them start before they want to, or stop when you want them to camp. They are tall, rugged-looking fellows of definitely Chinese appearance, and smoke little pipes of opium as they trudge behind their mules. Properly handled, they are a most useful form of transport, especially



for specie, but if you do not let them do the job in their own way, they are as obstinate as their own mules.

The march is by no means all jungle. We pass through several small rice plains dotted with picturesque villages, and I begin to get into the habit of passing the time of day with the village elders as I ride down their little main street.

"Where is Master going?" is the conventional greeting, though they know perfectly well.

"Up to Muang Wung, Uncle," I learn to reply, for these simple, kindly Laos speak of and to one another, even if complete strangers, in terms of family relationship. An old man is "gaffer" or "uncle," an old woman "old mother," and younger folk are "elder brother," "younger sister," etc.

With every day's march away from the large towns, the people are more primitive and more unspoilt. Many of these remote villages are a Utopia in miniature. Crime is unknown, and judging from the happy, open faces and gentle manners of the people one would hazard a guess that sin too is a stranger to these prosperous valleys. In later days when stationed in some down-country district where thieving and dacoity were rife, I often looked back wistfully to the simple peasants of Muang Wung.

After a week's march we reach the mouth of Mesong, the creek I am to girdle. Like all streams of any size, the last few miles of its course are a rice plain. At its junction with the main Mewung there is a considerable village, and smaller hamlets are dotted along the banks of Mesong as far as the limit of cultivation. Although we know most of the teak



Clearing a way through the jungle, Mewong



will be above this point, there are several plantations bordering the paddy-fields near its mouth, and these must be searched for girdleable trees. So my first camp is in the Wat or temple of Ban Mesong (Ban means village) which lies on the outskirts of the village overlooking the main Mewung.

Most of the adult and I should think the entire child population of the village came racing along to the Wat to see the elephants being unloaded and to have a good look at myself. It is many years since this part of the forest has been worked, and most of the children have never seen a white man before. This is a sufficient excuse for a curiosity that became more and more embarrassing. By the time I had sat down to lunch in the main "viharn" the children were ranged two deep at the temple door, and their comments on my appearance, food, and method of eating it were so frank that my "boy" finally "shooed" them away. They then retired to the low wall surrounding the temple courtyard from which they got a more distant but apparently quite satisfactory view of the proceedings.

We spent a few days girdling nearly two hundred trees on the foothills near the village. The jungle was a maze of tracks made by the villagers getting firewood or visiting their tobacco or cotton plantations. I was rather disturbed to notice red splashes as of blood all over the paths. Had some of the villagers been fighting with knives or been mauled by a tiger? My girdling headman was very amused when I voiced my fears. The red splashes were merely the juice spat out by the addicts of the disgusting habit of betel-chewing!

Most Lao villages contain groves of the beautiful areca palm, whose nuts are boiled, cut into

sections dried in the sun and used for chewing. Wrapped up in a leaf of the "pan" vine, the betel nut is masticated, and produces a copious flow of red saliva, which is spat out continually. In course of time it completely blackens the teeth, and the smile of a confirmed betel-chewer reveals a black cavern instead of a mouth. The habit is generally confined to older people, and, like arrack, is one of the solaces of senility.

I was soon camped higher up the valley, just beyond the range of cultivation. Trees were getting more numerous and the country was not yet difficult. I was getting on very nicely when I was suddenly struck down with dysentery.

On leaving Lakon my cook had laid in a store of butcher's beef, thinking it would keep in the cool weather. His intentions were of the best, as he wished to postpone the eternal diet of chicken. The beef had gradually gone bad, but he did not like to throw away what he had paid good money for, so he finally dished up the remains in the form of a potent curry which disguised the taste of the rotten meat. I ate heartily and next day had violent diarrhoea.

In a few days I was reduced to such desperate weakness that I could not leave my bed. Everything I ate or drank produced an immediate and imperative desire for evacuation accompanied by the most violent griping pains. This horrible internal agony only resulted in the passing of blood. I had no idea what was wrong with me, but gradually starved except for a little tinned milk, of which luckily I had a good supply. Meanwhile I had sent a messenger down to Lakon describing my symptoms and asking for medicine. It took him a week to do the double

journey in forced marches, and by the time he came back I was on the mend.

My instinct had been right. Semi-starvation was the right treatment, and the milk had just kept me alive. But for another week after I had begun to get better I had no strength to do anything but lie about in camp and watch flying lizards gliding down from tree to tree in front of my tent. It was getting very hot in the middle of the day, and convalescence was anything but comfortable. But the great thing was I had escaped. In a few more days I was girdling again.

I had been luckier than two friends of mine who, later on, when about the same distance out of station as I was, developed typhoid and pneumonia respectively, and died on the way in. In the matter of illness or injury the risks we fellows ran in the jungle were greater than those of expeditions of official exploration, where a medical officer was always one of the party. More than one man in my time died of perfectly curable ailments simply because there was not a doctor at hand in the first stages. We had to learn to be our own as well as the camp's doctor.

The cold weather had ended and the leaves were beginning to turn yellow. It was the end of January. The deciduous jungle was flaming in what at home would be called autumn tints. My camp had been moved right up the valley, and hills towered on either bank of the Mesong. The day's routine would be to splash upstream for a mile or so and then scale the hillside. At the end of a gruelling day we slithered down into the bed of the Mesong perhaps a mile above where we had started climbing. One day, owing to the length of a tributary stream, we ended where we had begun.

One day was very much like another. I used to look forward to my unappetising tiffin if only as a respite from the eternal climbing. It was getting hotter and hotter every day. The trees were almost stripped of leaves, and the thick carpet of dead leaves was beginning to burn in places. Whether these jungle fires are started by the sun or by the natives is not known. They certainly sometimes blaze up in places remote from any human habitation. As the hot weather increased the long grass and the tall undergrowth withered and grew brittle as tinder. Suddenly a sheet of flame would roar up the hillside, and we would have to run for the shelter of a patch of evergreen. Often we would have to start a protective fire to give ourselves a margin of escape. The earth was baked, the air was full of dust and ashes, and sometimes the water-bottle was finished long before the end of the day's work.

In a few weeks there was nothing left of vegetation in the deciduous zones. The trees were gaunt black skeletons whose naked branches gave no shade. The earth was inches thick in smouldering ashes which often concealed a treacherous hole where the fire had burnt down a tree and pursued its very roots into the ground. But in spite of the terrible heat of these conditions there were advantages. We could find our teak trees much more easily as they stood out from the smaller trunks. There was no longer a mass of waist-high undergrowth to fight our way through, one of the most wearying obstacles in a stiff climb. And at last I was to see big game.

There were sanctuaries of evergreen, islands in the burnt-out desert, or even an occasional half-acre or so of long grass which had somehow escaped the holocaust. In such retreats sambhur and barking-deer were lying up during the heat of the day. I

shall not easily forget my first glimpse of the bigger deer. A girdling coolie leading the way up a hill suddenly "froze" and whispered, "Look, Master, a sambhur!" and out of a patch of tall bamboo grass trotted a magnificent greyish-brown stag, the size of our home red deer. He paused, glanced in our direction, then galloped down the steep hillside at a pace that would have broken the neck of a less sure-footed beast.

The little red barking-deer, about the size of a goat with horns of a chamois, became quite a common sight. My shotgun was no good for larger game, but I felt sure that the few buck-shot-cartridges I possessed would be all right for the barking-deer. So one Sunday, while we were moving camp, I arranged for a drive.

Taking my station at a low pass between two hillsides, at the head of a steep valley, I had half a dozen coolies beating up towards me. I was partially concealed behind some bushes, and my khaki shirt, shorts and topee merged into the background of an unburnt patch of fallen leaves. After a while, I could hear the coolies beating up the hillside and gradually getting nearer. When they were about a hundred yards away, one of them uttered an exclamation, and I could hear the thud of a stone he had thrown. There was a grunt, a growl, and out of the bushes a large black Himalayan bear was charging straight at me. He was lumbering along in the most ungainly fashion and yet at great speed. I was frozen to the spot with fright: my only hope was to let him have both barrels of the shotgun in his chest as he rose on his hindlegs to maul me. I could now see the big white V on his chest, which gives him the Siamese name of the "buffalo bear," as their village buffaloes have the same mark.



When he was nearly ten yards away, I realised he had never seen me, and was going right past. Then I remembered that Ellis had told me how short-sighted they are, and that if you keep quite still their charge will almost certainly miss you. He had had the more unpleasant experience of being charged twice by a bear who knew he was there—had missed him first time, then turned and had another go. Ellis, who in his turn had missed the bear at twenty yards, had just time to reload his rifle for the return charge and down him at short range.

My bear had crashed past and was already at the bottom of the next valley. I was trembling all over, but managed to pull myself together before the beaters arrived. Then we moved off to another beat, my stand being at a similar kind of pass, while the beaters combed the valley below. This time a buck barking-deer cantered slowly out on my right, and I brought him down.

For the next few days I lived like a lord. The change from the eternal chicken was too marvellous. There were kidneys and liver, cutlets and joints, and from the jungle the cook had gathered mint for mint sauce. What an event in jungle life is a change of diet! Never afterwards did I miss any opportunity of bagging one of these deer for the pot, so delicious was their flesh. But the bear incident had determined me to get a proper rifle, and I wrote to Ellis for his advice. The answer took so long in coming all the distance from Raheng that I was in Lakon again before I received it.

We were now nearing the sources of Mesong, and were almost continually in evergreen jungle. This is called by the natives "pa dum"—black forest—because it is in perpetual twilight owing to the

density of vegetation. The branches of the huge resin or fromager trees and other dark-leaved varieties meet overhead, the undergrowth is thick with thorny bushes, while giant creepers, many of them covered with spiky thorns, interlace above so that even at midday only a few shafts of sunlight ever penetrate the green gloom. In the north of Thailand this "black jungle" only occurs in patches, but in the central and southern provinces it covers many square miles at a time.

To enter this cool forest after climbing a bare, burnt hillside was at first a great relief. But one is never comfortable for long in the jungle. Every bush is a colony of mosquitoes, and from the dank carpet of rotting leaves underfoot leeches innumerable wave their foul questing heads in our direction. Groves of wild bananas add to the density of shade: the stench of decaying vegetation is overpowering, and we are glad to fight our way out to the sunshine again.

Every fortnight I had to send in to Lakon, with a copy for the General Manager, a tabulated report not only of the girdlings in their sections and serial numbers but a count of all windfalls—burnt or blown-down trees—and an estimate of the size and number of trees just under the girdling limit. A detailed map had to accompany the report. Fortunately, map-making was one of my strong points. Then one had to forecast the route by which the timber would ultimately be extracted. Acting on a tip given me by Ellis, I took especial care over these reports. Brown, too, in his cynical way, had given me similar advice.

"To get on in this job, you must be good on paper. You can be the most bloody awful fool in

practice, or be lazy and never go out after tiffin, but if you give the impression of efficiency in your reports, you are bound to get on. Look at X. (a lately retired manager.) He never got to the headwaters of most of the creeks he girdled, but he wrote so well and was so good at the language that he became general manager inside ten years."

The weeks turned into months, and the routine of foot-slogging up the eternal Mesong and up and down its hundred hills had become almost automatic, when a mail from Lakon arrived which suddenly altered my whole horizon. My orders were to stop girdling, come out into the main Mewung, count all logs in the river down to Lakon (the annual stock-taking) and then be transferred to Payao District to take over a forest of my own! Here was promotion and good-bye to girdling! I had finished with the treadmill!

The stock-taking down-river was a pleasant interlude. I had to count all logs left in the river after the floods of the last rainy season, not only our own logs but those of other firms. Although thousands of logs float down to rafting stations every year, thousands are left behind, being stranded along the banks or stacked on the last rise of the season. By now they have all been dragged by elephants back into the bed of the river which, however, is now too shallow to float them: they must wait for next year's rains.

At first the count would be all plain sailing, according to Smith's letter, as there would only be our own firm's logs in the upper Mewung. But the map he enclosed showed that after passing the mouth of a certain tributary leased to another firm, their logs would have to be distinguished, and

lower down several other owners would have logs in the river. All the logs have been hammered with their firm's mark (generally the initials of the firm, as ours was LBTC) before being put in the river or any of its tributaries, so it should be easy to distinguish them.

Besides counting logs in the river-bed, I was ordered to keep a good lookout for logs inland, in places where the river had burst its banks or where the banks were low. I soon found that the hammermarks were not always decipherable, and often the log had to be examined all over to find a mark. In stretches of the river near villages this was often a most unpleasant task. There are no sanitary arrangements in the north of Thailand, and a log on a sandbar was a favourite form of midden!

I started my down-river trip from the mouth of Mesong in a tiny dugout, as the water was very low. My camp kit and servants were accommodated on two bamboo rafts which had been specially made for the occasion. The middle part of the raft was slightly raised to clear the water, which often came over the front and back parts where two polemen, one at bow and one at stern, guided the raft and kept it in the channel. I had only one man with a paddle in my dugout, and we were always much faster than the rafts, and had to wait for them at mealtimes and when it was time to camp for the night.

An English-speaking Siamese clerk had been sent up from the rafting station, which was closed at this time of year, to assist me in counting the logs. He was an expert on hammermarks as all categories of logs from the north pass through the rafting station at Paknampo. He was, however, quite unused to

the jungle and did not enjoy the occasions when he had to search for logs inland. We arranged that he took one bank of the river and I another. We each had our separate note-books, and at the end of the day I entered up the totals, often running into thousands, on the official form provided.

One day we passed a party of elephants belonging to a native Chief dragging some of the Chief's new workings into the river. There were several hundred logs, and they completely blocked the channel. The Chief's headman made them clear a passage for my dugout, and I warned him that we had two rafts coming on behind. Whether he did not hear properly, misunderstood me, or completely forgot I shall never know!

Soon after passing the elephant party, I stopped for lunch, which I had brought with me in the dugout. On starting again, we soon came to a narrow gorge about two miles long. There were very few logs in the gorge, as they do not usually stack in such places, and we made quite fair progress. We went gaily on, quite forgetting the rafts would be so much slower, and at dusk came to a little sandbar in the gorge where I decided to camp. The boatman got out and collected sticks to make a fire. I heard him make an exclamation, and point something out to the Siamese clerk. It was the fresh tracks of a tiger, showing up clearly in the wet sand!

No sign of the rafts, and it was nearly dark now. The boatman piled more and more sticks on the fire, and the three of us crouched round it. What a fool I had been not to wait for the rafts earlier! Here we were lost in tiger jungle, and I had not brought my gun with me in the dugout. I had thoughts of lighting torches and walking back up the river bank

until we found the rafts. Then I remembered there were several places in the gorges we had passed through where the hills came down sheer to the river-side and the going would be impossible. A detour would have to be made round the hills, and we were sure to get lost. Here at any rate we were certain of being picked up next day. We must make the best of it.

Night and day are of about the same length in Thailand, and that twelve hours of darkness seemed interminable. The Siamese clerk, bazaar-bred, was frankly unhappy and the boatman peered nervously over his shoulders from time to time, trying to pierce the shadows of the forest a few yards away from our tiny sandbar. I suppose I felt as scared as they were, but I made a pretence of cheerfulness. We dozed from time to time, only to become keenly awake when something rustled in the jungle behind us. About midnight a kind of snarling cough made us jump to our feet and stand rigid. It was a panther on the prowl. We listened intently, and heard it slinking away. No more dozing! We piled more brushwood on the fire, and talked in loud voices for the rest of the night.

Dawn came eerily, unexpectedly. The inky river began to gleam as a cold wind swept down it, and the opposite bank came into view. I was cold, stiff and hungry, but in a few minutes the first rays of the sun turned misery into an almost ridiculous happiness. It was good to be alive! The clerk and boatman stripped and waded into the river for their morning bathe, while I lay down on a dry patch of sand and slept like a log. Day had brought back the feeling of security, and everything was normal. The jungle, I felt, is as safe as anywhere—except at night.

About eleven o'clock the rafts arrived. They had reached the block of logs late in the afternoon, and the Chief's elephants had finished work for the day and been let loose in the jungle. Their camp was some miles inland, and by the time one of the polemen had found it, it was nearly dark. There was nothing to be done that day. Then my "boy" sent the other poleman with a torch down-river to try and find us, but when he came to the impossible part of the gorge he very sensibly turned back. Early in the morning an elephant was sent down to clear a way for the rafts. And so I was once more reunited to my transport, and dealt ravenously with a large "brunch!"

About midday we started off again. The river opened up into a series of blazing sandbars covered with logs. By evening I was shivering with ague. Fever was the inevitable result of the night's exposure, but by lying off next day and intensive sweating out in between large doses of quinine, I managed to get rid of it. Next day I was weak, but with a normal temperature, and stopped work at midday. After that I was able to carry on as usual.

I was gradually to make the discovery that I was one of those lucky people on whom quinine had no bad effect, and who reacted readily to its healing qualities. Thus malaria, the chief curse of jungle life, had lost its terrors for me. There were others who took days or weeks to recover from a bout of fever, and a few who had to be sent home for good because malaria was in their blood. One of these poor fellows, who had been home for over a year, died of malaria brought on by a simple chill.

At last we were nearing Lakon. I had counted over twenty thousand logs in the course of my stock-

taking, which had taken eleven days, including the day I was ill. As we neared the city's suburbs, the work became more and more unpleasant. Logs were tied up in front of houses and used as latrines, but they had to be examined all the same. The climax came when we reached the barracks, in front of which a large batch of logs had been tied up for the same purpose. The soldiers stood on the banks laughing and cracking jokes as the white man nosed like a pariah amongst their ordure!



## CHAPTER VIII

### MY OWN FOREST

THERE was only one snag about my new job—I should be under the notorious Philips, who was District Manager of Payao. There were only two opinions it seems, about Philips. He was alternatively the world's worst swine, or the finest chap who had ever come out to Thailand. Those who disliked him said that the bitterness of his tongue was only exceeded by the acidity of his pen—and this was a major charge. There is nothing more calculated to get the "jungle-wallah" "down" than what is known as a "stinker" from headquarters. A "stinker" is an official, semi-official or private "chit" which conveys disapproval of one's work. I must say that almost all the men up-country, whatever their ability were genuinely keen on their work. Hence a "stinker" was about the most depressing thing that could happen to one in the jungle.

There was the story of A., who had received a succession of "stinkers" from a manager who disliked him personally as well as being dissatisfied with his work. A. drank poison in a certain bungalow, and walked up and down its verandah in agony until he collapsed and died. Many years afterwards, I slept in another room of that bungalow, being the only occupant. In the middle of the night I heard sounds as of the ceaseless pacing up and down of a man in torment. Not having heard the story of A., I put it down to rats.

The trouble about "stinkers" is that they do more harm than good. All one's morale is needed to endure being alone in the jungle. All one's energy is required to get through a season's work in that climate—even if one is perfectly fit all the time. But when the eagerly expected weekly mail brings only harsh criticism or destructive comment, there ensues a mood of deep depression which the surroundings of eternal, mocking trees only too readily intensify. When in my turn I became a manager, I was careful to reserve my criticism until the man came into station. Then I let him have it and he, in the cheerful atmosphere of unaccustomed companionship, could "take it." Also, a verbal reproof does not damage his prospects by going on the files.

Philips was tall, dark and good-looking in a saturnine kind of way. I soon found out what was wrong with him. He had brains, and was therefore assured of a certain amount of unpopularity. Also he was efficient, and demanded quite a high standard of efficiency from his staff. He judged them by their work, not by their social qualities or ability to play polo. But if you were prepared to learn your job, he was only too glad to teach you. He was tremendously keen on the work, and could not bear to see it bungled. Reports and accounts must be concise and accurate. The rudiments of accountancy were incidentally another essential to our multifarious duties, and the large sums of money that passed through our hands were debitable under quite an elaborate system of headings. It was easy for the uninitiated to make mistakes, but it was no use sending in a cash account to Philips which contained any errors—it simply came back by return of mail. He also insisted that all reports, which were supposed to

be in triplicate, should be typewritten, because he had been unable to read one of my predecessors' handwriting! These reports, he would insist, must be framed in such a way that the state of the work in your forest at the time of writing must be patent to the veriest fool, i. e., the higher command! If Philips had a certain contempt for an inefficient subordinate, it was as nothing compared to his opinion of the General Manager or the Head Office in London!

I was one of the lucky few who got on well with Philips. I took to him from the start, and I think he liked me. Anyhow, he found I was only too willing to learn his methods. It was in fact a treat to come across a man who had such a good grasp of detail. For two whole days we worked in his office while he explained his system of accounts and reports. The next day he took me round the large compound with a compass and plotting board to teach me the rudiments of surveying. He was the only district manager who made any attempt at scientific map-making. The others would be content with rough sketches which were often alarmingly inaccurate. One of our chief problems in the extraction of teak was to find the shortest route from place to place. And in my new forest I was to construct about a dozen miles of cart-road, in which work a knowledge of surveying would be most useful.

Why had not Philips, with all his abilities, risen to be General Manager, or at least manager of one of the larger stations? The reason, I found out later, was because he did not get on well with his opposite numbers in other firms. He was never one to suffer fools gladly, and while our own staff were mentally below the home average, they were brainy compared to many of the opposition companies. It was an

axiom of our higher command that you must be popular with your rivals. The teak business in Thailand must surely be the only one in the world where such an ideal is desired. Of course, in dealing with the Siamese Government on questions of royalty, duty of forest regulations, or when the British firms were in the elephant or rice market, a united front was necessary to gain our ends and curtail our costs. But why one should submit to X., of the Y. Company, pouring gin down one's throat in the effort to pick one's brains for methods and details of efficient working, I could never understand. But to drive a bargain or stick up for one's rights with an opposition firm was somehow considered bad form!

The few days in Payao with Philips put a new spirit into me, and I was all agog to get on with my new job. My predecessor had already gone home urgently on sick leave, so there was no handing over on the spot. It was all done on paper in the office. Philips gave me the working plans for the season. There were fifty elephants in the Metum forest, and with these I was expected to deliver three thousand new workings not, as in most forests, to a floating stream, but to buffalo-cart-roads. Metum, outside the headwaters of its various streams, was a comparatively flat forest, and the last ten miles or so of teak extraction was by carting.

The journey up to Metum forest took a week, and on the last day, after crossing a steep range of evergreen hills, I found myself riding down a cart-track through laterite jungle. After about eight miles of this easy going, I arrived at Metum forest headquarters. On a small knoll in the scrub jungle, surrounded by a large fenced paddock in which goats were grazing, stood a large bungalow on piles built of teak and roofed with teak shingles. A broad open

verandah in front commanded as good a view as was possible in the midst of jungle, for the nearest native village was ten miles away. This was easily the best jungle headquarters I had seen, and the reason for its superiority was that it was used more than any other forest building. Owing to the network of cart-roads which were easy for riding, most of the elephant camps could be visited in the day, and one rarely had to camp out. And as Metum was so far from Payao, one was expected to stay out of station for longer periods than usual and not waste a fortnight on the double journey more often than necessary!

When I had climbed up the steep flight of stairs that led on to the front verandah, I was delighted to see that beyond the miles and miles of scrub jungle there rose, in the distance, a magnificent range of hills culminating in a rounded peak which had a rocky spur, shaped like a pagoda, sticking out of its side. This landmark, I was told later, was called Doi Mun Moo, and the spur thrusting out from its side could be seen from one of our Muang Wung bungalows on the other side of the range, some fifty miles from Metum. It must therefore have often happened that Brown and I, sitting out on the verandah sipping our evening drink, were gazing at the same hill. There was comfort in that thought.

Behind the bungalow was a large rice godown, a stores shed and the godown clerk's bamboo-and-thatch house. To the right was my cookhouse and servants' quarters, and the stables, which contained a sleeping berth for the "sais". Farther down the slope, away on the right as one stood on the verandah, was a large barn-like shack to accommodate the coolies, and next to it was the bullock shed, the

blacksmith's hut and the cart-house. Metum, being so far from any village, was almost self-supporting. Our own team of pack-bullocks delivered the rice to the working camps, and our own Shan blacksmith repaired the elephant chains and fitted the iron tyres on to the timber-carts. There was thus quite a large staff on our compound, and I was the only one who lived alone!

Looking back on it, this Metum headquarters seems the epitome of desolation. It was not even on any route between villages, the nearest village was ten miles away and one rarely saw a stranger. It was easily the loneliest forest bungalow in the country. Yet, in those early days, to me it seemed almost a palace, and all the staff my courtiers. In this little community, and in the elephant camps scattered throughout twenty square miles of jungle, my word was law. I was, to use their own phrase, the "father and mother" of the hundred and fifty-odd workers in the forest. After the drudgery of girdling, it was good to be on one's own!

Reviewing my native assistants, the most important and responsible was the godown clerk or storekeeper, whose duty it was to check and issue the rice and paddy stocks as well as all the stores used by the camps. I was, I thought, exceedingly lucky in my storekeeper. He was an educated Siamese, and had once been a clerk in an Amphur's (Siamese District Magistrate's) office. It was a surprise to find a Siamese in such an out-of-the-way place, and such a treasure at that. He prepared neat and correct accounts, with the items in Siamese, which I could now read, and the figures in English. Nai Tong Dee was indeed a paragon—I had yet to find that my idol had feet of clay!

In connection with these forest accounts, I was again pleasantly surprised to find that the decimal system had apparently been in vogue in Thailand from time immemorial. A grain of rice was the unit and a man's daily ration was a "pun," which means a thousand grains! Needless to say, the thousand grains were not counted out, but represented by a wooden measure. All the other amounts were multiples of a "pun"—a "meun" was ten thousand grains, a "sen" a hundred thousand and a "lan" a million. The "sen" was the buying unit, and the price of rice used to vary from five to twenty rupees a "sen" according to the district and the harvest.

It was now the end of May, and the rainy season had started in earnest. The elephants had come out of their three months' hot-weather rest camps, and were established in half a dozen felling camps in the headwaters of the various streams to be worked in the season. One of my chief duties now was to inspect fellings at their stumps, and show the headmen how to log the trees as economically as possible. This is where the preliminary training in the sawmill was to be valuable. I soon found that inspection at stumps was a good deal more laborious than girdling. The noise of a teak tree being felled can be heard for miles around. The dry upper branches crash into a hundred fragments, and the huge tree generally brings down with it several other jungle trees or clumps of bamboo. One has to fight one's way through all this twisted debris to get at the main bole, and the undergrowth is now growing almost visibly. The effect of the warm rain on the ash-covered earth has carpeted the hills with inches of vegetation in a day. The phrase "Do not let the grass grow under your feet" does not seem at all absurd in the tropics!

When the trees have been logged, the process of "ton taw" begins. This is a Burmese expression meaning to get the log from its stump on to a drag path. One end of the log is "shoe-d" or rounded off like the sole of a clog, and the elephant bends down and with his tusks or forehead pushes the log endwise down the slope of the hill. The earth is soaked with the rains, and the log soon gathers momentum and crashes down the hillside, arriving, if lucky, unsplit in the bed of the tributary stream, or nullah. Sleepers of green branches cut to about six-foot lengths are laid across the bed of the nullah to make a drag-path over which the logs are dragged by elephants in chain harness for miles until they reach a floating stream or a cart-road. The average distance a log is dragged by one elephant at a time is a third of a mile, and this is known officially as a "drag." The whole batch of timber from any given area thus progresses a "drag" at a time, and must be calculated to reach its destination before the hot weather begins, otherwise all the timber will be destroyed in forest fires.

To watch the elephants at their work was a constant delight. The riders, their heads almost completely covered with a cloth or turban as a protection against the sandflies which enveloped each elephant like a cloud, shouted their orders, and the huge beasts obeyed with a precision which would be the envy of any riding master training his horses. Some of the big tuskers were strong enough to drag two or three moderate-sized logs at a time. Some logs, on the other hand, were so enormous that it might take three or four elephants to move them. Many of the females had small calves running at heel, who got in everybody's way and were thoroughly miserable until the midday halt was called.



It was the misfortune of us jungle-wallahs that all the principal forest work takes place in the rainy season, when the jungle is most unhealthy and even natives would not choose, except for the good pay they got from the firms, to be in the jungle. But the working of teak would be impossible at any other time of year. The fellings would all be smashed on the hard ground, and the shifting from stumps and dragging could not take place except in mud. For the same reason, the construction of my new cart-roads had to be commenced now, and this work was an interesting variation from the work of the elephant camps.

Apart from the headwaters of its various streams, where the elephants were working, the Metum forest was mostly undulating country with an occasional deep nullah and a few outcrops of limestone rocks. The route of my first cart-road lay for the most part along the crest of a small ridge, and my survey was plain sailing until I came to an outcrop of rock there was no means of avoiding. Philips had prepared me for this, and I had taken up a supply of dynamite cartridges and detonators. I had, of course, never done any blasting before, but in our job one learnt all kinds of sidelines on the spot, and I had been told what to do, and to play for safety by using long lengths of fuse until I could gauge the pace at which the fuse burned. My Kamu road-gang had hacked away as much of the shale as they could with pickaxes, and I was left with about a hundred yards of cart-track in which a dozen large limestone boulders barred the way.

With sledge-hammer and chisel the coolies had drilled several deep holes in every rock. I fitted a detonator on to the end of six feet of fuse, embedded the detonator into a cartridge of dynamite, tamped

it down, sent all the men a hundred yards away, selected a sheltering rock for myself, and lit the end of the fuse with a match. The fuse seemed to sizzle at an alarming pace, so I bolted to the shelter of an overhanging rock, and waited. Nothing happened for what seemed so long that I began to think there had been a misfire. I was debating with myself whether to go out and look, when a terrific explosion shook the air, and bits of rock rained all around my shelter. The Kamus cheered lustily (what babies they are!) and came running to see the result. Quite half the first rock was blown to pieces.

After that I got bolder and, partly to save time and partly to economise in fuse, used it in shorter and shorter lengths until I reached safety limit by having to bolt for my shelter in earnest! By the end of an exciting day all the rocks had disappeared and I had a new achievement to my credit. Some years later, when inspecting a native contractor's workings, I found that he had his own method of disposing of rocks which obstructed his drag-path. It was quite effective, but could only be done in the hot weather, when conditions were favourable. His coolies would pile brushwood on top of and all around the rock, and set the bonfire alight. As soon as it had burnt itself out, and while the rock was at white heat, they poured buckets of cold water on the rock, which at once split in several places.

Continuing my survey, I found there was one last difficulty to be overcome before my first cart-road could emerge from the foothills into flat country. A deep nullah had to be bridged. There was no possibility of avoiding it, and the bridge would have to be quite fifty feet in length and in places twenty feet above the bed of the nullah. A Burmese carpenter was sent from Meing, the nearest

town of any size, and agreed to make the bridge for three hundred rupees. I lent him a camp elephant to drag his jungle-wood piers, and in a couple of months he had constructed a most serviceable bridge, which stood up well to the heavy traffic which subsequently passed over it, and of which both he and I were inordinately proud! It even earned Philips's approval.

The one great advantage of Metum forest was that I could visit all my elephant camps and road-making gangs in the day, and always have a roof over my head at night. On the other hand I was denied the variety, common to most forests of larger size, of shifting camp from time to time. In spite of the interest of my new job, my surroundings were beginning to pall. I found that I was by no means the only person in Metum to suffer at times from jungle *ennui*. The slightly more educated natives, in spite of the companionship of others (which I alone lacked) found Metum lonely, and applied their own remedy. I now had an English-speaking Madras cook, who was very good indeed at every branch of his art. One evening my usually well-cooked dinner turned out to be a most unappetising mess, and the "boy's" explanation was that "Cook is drunk". I rushed down the stairs and over to the cookhouse, where I found my "chef" sitting on the floor incapable for the moment of anything but a self-conscious giggle. I shook him roughly and asked him what he meant by it. He so far came to himself to swear this was the first occasion he had ever got drunk and added: "If Ramaswamy ever do this again, I beg Master beat it!" The "it" being his low opinion of himself if ever caught again!

On another occasion, just as I was going to bed, my "boy" rushed over from the servants' quarters

and told me my pony-boy was drunk and threatening everybody with a knife. I seized my torch and the "boy" led the way down to the coolies' shed where I found the young devil sitting down in a half-stupor and flourishing an enormous "dah" (long Shan knife). At intervals he was shouting defiance to all and sundry and inviting them to test his swordsmanship. I shouted to him to drop the "dah," which he did in sheer astonishment at my appearance. Then the "boy" and I half-dragged, half-carried him up to the stores godown, tied his hands behind his back with a rope, laid him on the floor and locked him up till the morning, when he awoke the sorriest specimen of a "hang-over" I ever saw!

These domestic crises were annoying, but my greatest shock was still to come. Early one morning some weeks later the head bullock-driver came up my verandah steps looking very sorry for himself, and with a frightful black eye. He complained that Nai Tong Dee, the stores clerk, had beaten him up the previous night. It seemed to me quite ridiculous that an educated man like Nai Tong Dee should ever have any contact with a boorish peasant like the Lao herdsman and I frankly disbelieved his story. However, when sending him about his business, I said I would enquire into the matter.

Just before breakfast I had occasion to send for Tong Dee. He came slowly and unsteadily up the stairs, and stood shuffling before me. I was horrified at his appearance. His usually neat hair was unkempt, his eyes blood-shot, and his breath! Though he was standing two or three yards away from me and half on the open verandah, a positive blast of alcoholic fumes broke over me, and I was nearly sick on the spot. I sent him away at once and told him to come again in the evening, "when,"

I added meaningly, "your headache is better!" I learnt later from my "boy" that there had been a drinking and gambling party the night before down in the coolie lines, and that the herdsman had accused Tong Dee of cheating.

So now the reason for his having lost that good Government job, and his willingness to take up a lonely though well-paid jungle post were apparent. He was, not habitually but when suitable opportunity offered or when he was bored, both a gambler and a drunkard. This meant that even if I did not sack him, I must in future check all his rice and stores balances most rigorously. I was beginning to learn that nobody can be trusted, and also that this unnatural jungle life is no better for the natives than for me.

It was some months before I discovered how and when my native staff enjoyed their simple pleasures. The camps were paid up every two or three months, and at least two months' pay was always kept in hand, to guard against wholesale desertions. Although the nearest villages were ten miles away, their inhabitants always knew when my men had been paid up. It was just an instance of the mysterious way news spreads in the jungle, what in Africa is called the "bush telegraph." I was to meet several instances in Thailand. Anyhow, within a day of the camps' receiving their wages, the first of two expeditions from the villages would arrive in the forest. A procession of young girls, of buxom and sometimes pleasing appearance, and always in charge of some sharp-tongued, hard-bitten old dame, carried baskets of cheap bazaar goods, cakes, sweetmeats, cheap Chinese cigarettes and the like, round to the various camps. The party generally spent the night in the camp, and no doubt some of them sold themselves

as well as their other stock-in-trade. So far, so good, except that the prices they charged, at any rate for their goods, were most exorbitant.

A day or two after the girls had gone the round of the forest, a party of male villagers would arrive. These were professional gamblers, and sold arrack. They were expert card-sharpers, and many times in after years when pointing out the folly of gambling to my men, I would ask if there was any record of any camp men having won money off these gentry. The answer was always shamefaced and the same. What chance would a half-fuddled Kamu have against these vultures? I am glad to say many districts, like Muang Wung, were free from the pests, but Payao, as Lao districts go, had rather a bad reputation.

The truth is, I am afraid, that these midnight visitors were exploiting a national weakness. Gambling is in the blood of the Siamese and Laos, and the stakes played for out of all proportion to the means of the players. Some years afterwards a Siamese Amphur (District Magistrate) in another district called at my camp in a state of great agitation. We were quite friendly, and he had been of help to me in checking tusk thieves. So I asked him what I could do for him. It appeared that the Government auditor on his annual inspection was at that very moment waiting in the Amphur's office some ten miles away for the Amphur to return from tour and open his safe for checking the cash balance.

"Master," said the Amphur pathetically, "there should be a balance of more than two thousand ticals in that safe, and there is nothing! I daren't face the auditor, I shall be put under arrest. I have been most unlucky with the cards for months past. If you will lend me two thousand-odd ticals, I will repay

you gradually with any interest you like to name. Please, please help me!"

The Amphur's official salary would not be more than two hundred ticals a month!

The embarrassment of having to refuse his request was mitigated by the fact that I had completely run out of specie myself, having recently paid up all my camps. So my poor friend went to gaol. He was merely one of many victims in my own experience of that craze for gaming which up to a comparatively short time ago was catered for by the public gambling houses which made a substantial contribution to the national revenue. The Siamese Government is certainly to be congratulated on its self-sacrifice in closing down these institutions.

Gambling appeals to the Oriental even more than to the Westerner because of the lure of financial reward for the minimum of effort. Other forms of "investment" such as racing and football are largely denied to the Siamese, who love a "flutter" as much as anyone. It is not surprising that the boredom of jungle life should favour a game of cards in the evening, but it was obviously my duty to discourage it whenever I had the opportunity, not only because the men lost their hard-earned wages, but because it made them so late for work next morning!

So even the jungle had its night life, and there were predatory human beings as well as the striped and spotted prowlers of the dark hours. And while I was in charge of Metum there occurred a midnight party in one of the camps where a most sinister and diabolical crime took me right back to the Dark Ages. One of my elephant headmen was an English-

speaking Karen called Maung Toon Min. His name was Burmese, and like most Karens who had drifted over the border from Burmah he was a Christian, product of a Baptist Mission. He was a good worker and an honest man. One morning a frightened messenger arrived at the bungalow to say that Maung Toon Min had gone mad. I jumped on my pony and when nearing his camp met Toon Min on the road. Instead of his usual khaki shirt, shorts and topee, he was wearing the strangest collection of long flowing robes with a turban round his head, and looked more like a Palestine Jew or an Arab than a native of the Far East. I stopped my pony and hailed him, but he walked past me with staring, unseeing eyes, babbling gibberish and quite obviously out of his mind. Then I rode on to his camp and held an enquiry.

His men were frightened, but their story was quite clear. The night before a Burmese from Me-ing called Maung Maung had visited the camp. He was a shady character, a purveyor of arrack and a self-styled doctor. He was known to be on bad terms with Toon Min, but whether this enmity dated from their Burmah days or was due to Toon Min's discouragement of Maung Maung's visits to the camp was uncertain. Toon Min had a slight fever that night, and there were witnesses who saw Maung Maung give him a drink of so-called medicine, after which, although it was past midnight, the visitor disappeared. The effect of the draught was to send Toon Min off into a stupor. When he awoke in the morning he was a raving lunatic.

I sent a message to the Amphur of Me-ing, who arrived next day with two gendarmes and took depositions from Toon Min's men. He also took



Toon Min back to Me-ing with him in the hope that he would recover sufficiently to give evidence. Maung Maung was never caught, and poor Toon Min as far as I know is still wandering about the bazaar and out-villages of Me-ing as mad as ever and living on the easy charity of the compassionate. The incident made a profound impression on me. Black magic was still alive in Thailand. Here was a drug, and a fiend cruel enough to use it, which could at once deprive a man of all that distinguishes him from the animals.

Another tragedy marred my year in Metum, and lost me my best elephant headman. Maung Po Chit was an ascetic, a hard worker himself and a hard task-master to his men. He once told me that he loved nobody and nothing but his work, and nobody loved him! This was not surprising, for his riders were not allowed a munch of breakfast before going out to catch their elephants from grazing, but were sent out at the crack of dawn. When they rode their elephants into camp for harnessing, they were each handed up a ball of rice by the camp cook, and had to eat it sitting on their elephant's neck: and then off to work! In spite of this harsh treatment, Po Chit had sufficient personality to control his men, and desertions from his camp were infrequent. It was an elephant that rebelled.

Poo Kum Tun was what is known as a "man-killer." That is to say that he was liable, at intervals long or short according to the mahout's skill or good luck, to turn on his rider and kill him. I shall never forget the first time I saw Poo Kum Tun when inspecting the forest elephants soon after my arrival. The other elephants were paraded before me in line, and then I asked if that was all. "No, Master," said Po Chit. "There is still Poo Kum Tun." He

shouted an order, and from behind a bamboo clump on the edge of the camp came a tusker of medium size, with short sharp tusks, and an indefinable air about him. The other elephants, and the footmen, had retired to a safe distance. Behind Poo Kum Tun walked a man with a long spear, and when the elephant was halted about twenty yards away from me, the spearman came round to his head and kept his long spear pointed at the elephant's cheek.

Inexperienced as I was, I could see something sinister about Poo Kum Tun. His eyes, instead of being large and brown and kind like those of the other elephants, were small and yellow and baleful as in a reptile. Every time he put out his trunk in my direction, to sniff the stranger, the rider's iron goad crashed down on his skull and the footman made threatening passes with his spear. Both the rider and footman were picked men, and drew four times the ordinary wages. Both had taken over their duties from a mangled corpse, and both kept up their morale by smoking opium.

About one in a hundred working elephants is a man-killer. Whether their savagery is due to faults in training or inherent temperament is a moot point with native experts, but they have all one thing in common. They are always the finest and strongest workers in the camp, and as such their value outweighs their criminal streak. There is never any difficulty in replacing their riders or footmen, for the high pay tempts a successor. Besides with careful treatment and constant precaution the elephant may have a clean sheet for years. Then some carelessness in putting on the hobbles, some extra bit of hard work on a hot day, and the man-killer is true to his name.

So it was with Maung Po Chit. The messenger from the camp who reported his death told a story which, knowing Po Chit, I could well believe. He was anxious to finish dragging a certain batch of timber that day. It was past midday, when the elephants generally stop work, and there was one big log still to drag. Po Chit ordered Poo Kum Tun's rider to drag it. The footman demurred, saying Poo Kum Tun was tired and angry.

"All right, if you are afraid, give me your spear, and I will fix the drag-chain on to the log myself," said Po Chit.

"Poo Kum Tun was very quick," said the messenger. "In one motion he had plucked the spear from the Pawleung's (headman's) hands and seized him round the waist."

He covered his face with his hands.

"Parts of the Pawleung are still hanging from a nearby bamboo clump twenty feet high!"

This was quite true as I found when I went to bury him.

My cart-roads were finished, a dozen miles of them, and the timber was nearly all delivered to the cart-roads in batches of a hundred or more. The rains were over, and I was busily engaged in measuring the timber and having the logs hammered all over with the firm's stamp, L.B.T.C. Measuring timber I found one of the least pleasant of my many jobs. To begin with, it did not involve healthy exercise such as one always got from jungle inspections. The timber was always delivered to an open clearing, and one stewed in the sun from dawn to dusk. The glare from the yellow logs and the white

note-book in which the measurements were recorded tended to produce a headache. I was heartily glad when all the measuring was over, and carting was due to begin.

Our blacksmith had got about fifty teak-wood carts ready, with iron tyres and greased axles, and all that was needed was the buffaloes. We had two hundred of these, all branded with the firm's "chop" in Metum, but during the rainy season they had all been hired out to Me-ing villagers to plough their rice fields. The villagers had been ordered to return all the buffaloes on a certain day, and bring with them so many baskets of paddy, which was the agreed hire price in kind per buffalo. The large paddock in front of my bungalow was quite capable of holding the two hundred buffaloes, and its long grass would make good grazing while they and their paddy were being checked.

On the appointed day the buffaloes started filtering into the paddock from early morning. They were, as usual, mostly in charge of small boys, whose elders carried their contributions of paddy up to the godown behind the bungalow. By about three in the afternoon nearly all the buffaloes had arrived, and I was congratulating myself on everything passing off smoothly. At that moment, one of the small boys, moving his buffalo to a corner of the paddock, started a hare, which most unfortunately broke back into the middle of the paddock. Your Lao small boy, like his opposite number at home, is nothing if not a sportsman, and in a trice the urchins had all leapt down from the backs of their charges and were chasing the hare all over the paddock, shouting with excitement at the top of their voices. This was too much for the buffaloes, who are nervous beasts at the best of times. There ensued the wildest stampede

I have ever seen. Nearly two hundred buffaloes with tossing horns and waving tails surged on to the paddock fencing, broke it down and galloped off into the scrub jungle! It took the best part of three days before they were collected again!

The carting season begins in mud and ends in dust. At first the unmetalled roads, particularly in laterite jungle, have a certain amount of "binding" from the residue of moisture left over from the rains. But after a few months of hot weather the cart wheels have churned the whole surface into a fine dust which lies inches deep on the track, and envelops the buffalo teams and their carts in a cloud which renders them invisible. How they and the drivers can breathe is a mystery, and as a matter of fact a lot of the animals die in the course of the season. But buffaloes are comparatively cheap.

I was intrigued by the primitive method of loading these logs, many weighing several tons, on to the carts. A gang of men with a long levering pole would raise one end of the log a few inches, sufficient to insert a five or six-foot batten under the log. Then another would be inserted a few feet nearer the centre of the log, parallel to the first, both being at right angles to the line of the log. The next two battens would rest on the first two, and parallel to the log, whose end was thus gradually raised on a structure looking like a child's house made of matches until it was just above the height of a cart's axle. The process was repeated at the other end of the log, which was now raised two or three feet from the ground. A cart was then wheeled under the log, or two if the log was a long one, the log tied on to the cart with chains, the buffalo team hitched on, and off they went! In later years we imported cranes and other civilised devices for loading logs,



A teak raft on the Meping river



but what they saved in time could not compare with the cheapness and efficiency of the primitive Lao method.

The weather grew hotter every day, the jungle had commenced to burn, the last log of my scheduled three thousand had been delivered to cart-road, and the elephants were sent a five days' march into the high evergreen in the sources of a river called Meyom for their annual rest-camp. While the elephants did nothing for three months, their riders were supposed to weave breastbands, so many for each elephant, as they often broke under the strain of dragging, make girths, cruppers and saddles from the bark of various suitable evergreen trees, repair or make howdahs, and generally have all dragging gear ready for the following season. Later on, I was to inspect the rest-camps to see how the elephants were putting on flesh, and also to see that their riders were doing their allotted tasks and not emulating their charges in *dolce far niente*.

After seeing that the carting staff were working up to schedule and likely to deliver all the logs to floating streams before the break of the monsoon made carting impossible, I worked my way up the Meyom on the annual stock-taking and eventually arrived in the rest-camp area. The last native village lay two days' march to the south and my rest-camps were on the fringe of a vast forest of evergreen which stretched right away to the valley of the mighty Mekong, which formed the boundary between Thailand and the French Lao States. The day after I had pitched camp, I received a visit from a friendly old Lao who introduced himself as the headman of the nearest native village, and proceeded to tell me the remarkable story of "The Wild Men of the Woods."



This huge belt of evergreen is the last shelter of a race of aborigines more primitive than the Malayan Sakai or even the "bush-fellows" of Australia. The Laos call them "Pee Tong Lieung"—"ghosts of the yellow leaf." They were, even then, nearly extinct. But Poo Mee, the headman, said his father had actually seen them, and he himself had come across one of their resting-places. They are jungle nomads, and make rough lean-to shelters of the fronds of the wild banana. They sleep on beds of leaves. As soon as the evergreen leaves begin to turn yellow, which, means from three or four days to a week according to the time of year, these "ghosts of the yellow leaf" move off to some fresh encampment.

According to Poo Mee and his father's information they are small, woolly-haired and entirely naked. They live on roots and jungle berries, but are carnivorous when they get the chance. They are swift enough to run down deer, and despatch them with pointed bamboos. They do not know the use of fire. Poo Mee, as a young man with a party of village hunters, once came across an encampment where the leafy beds were still warm. But the aborigines, true to their name of "ghost," had faded away into the evergreen without a sound while the hunting-party could not have been more than twenty yards away.

On my return from the rest-camps, I found the existence of the "Pee Tong Lieung" corroborated by all the older villagers of the upper Meyom valley. Some added picturesque but scarcely creditable details, such as that the aborigines could speak every one of the many Lao, Kamu, Karen and other hill-tribe dialects current in that corner of Thailand. No doubt the Pee Tong Lieung are really ghosts by now,

and they must have been the last survivors of those negrito aborigines who roamed throughout Thailand when evergreen forest covered most of the country, long before the persecutions of a certain Kublai Khan drove a Chinese tribe called Thai (the free people) to seek their fortunes in that unexplored jungle between the Salween and the Mekong.

On my way down to Payao, after a whole year alone in Metum, I met a mail telling me I was to be transferred to charge of the Melee forest in the district of Chiangmai.

## CHAPTER IX

### CHIENGMAI

I received the news of my transfer with mixed feelings. As far as white men were concerned, Chiengmai was our largest station. It would certainly be a change after my year of loneliness, but I had got used to my own society and did not relish the idea of "poodle-faking," which was said to be one of the chief amusements of "The Northern Capital." According to Philips, the Chiengmai Club was pervaded by an atmosphere of "gentility" which he, personally, found distasteful! However, Philips was an unusual man, and it might not be so bad after all.

Chiengmai is the largest town in the north of Thailand, and is therefore sometimes called a city. It is the seat of the Siamese Viceroy of the Northern Provinces, and is often referred to as the northern capital. There is also a Lao Chief, but the holder of the title at that time was neither so senior nor so much of a character as the old Chief of Lakon, and was somewhat overshadowed by the Viceroy, who was some sort of cousin to His Siamese Majesty.

The rains had not yet started and I was not due to go out to Melee for another fortnight. There were a large number of American missionaries in Chiengmai, and many of them were fond of entertaining and being entertained. No doubt they were a very good influence on the "jungle-wallahs," but one could not help contrasting their lives with those

of the French Roman Catholic missionaries farther south, who lived in poverty among the natives, never went home on leave, and died in the country celibate to the end. Certainly their austerity would appeal to the Buddhist ideal, and their ritual to the Oriental form of worship, so it is to be presumed that the majority of the fifty thousand registered Christians in Thailand would be Catholics.

However, our American friends were kindly and hospitable, and during my first fortnight in Chiengmai I found myself often wearing a white suit in the evening and sometimes (an unaccustomed horror after a year of open neck) the stiff collar which accompanies a dinner jacket. One of these occasions was when, in company with three other "teak wallahs," I was asked to dine with the Viceroy.

His Serene Highness Prince Bavaradej (the final "j" is pronounced as a "t") had spent all his early life in Europe, where his father had held high diplomatic posts in most of the important capitals. The Prince was, in fact, born in Europe and educated at Harrow and Woolwich, where he was said to have won the Sword of Honour of his year. It was he who, many years after, led a counter-revolution the suppression of which was described in an English paper as yet another victory of Eton over Harrow, the King being an O.E.!

At the gate of the Prince's residence a gendarme with fixed bayonet presented arms, and on the doorstep we were greeted by a diminutive page dressed in white silk jacket and yellow silk "panung" who showed us into a large reception room where we found the Prince chatting with two senior station managers from other firms. There were thus six of us Englishmen together, and after a round

of sherry we sat down in another room to as good a European dinner as I have eaten in Thailand.

Our host was a charming, cultured man who could speak well on any subject, thoroughly understood our "old school tie" mentality, and at once put the shyest of us at our ease. Like all Siamese, particularly the higher classes, he had a great sense of humour and an infectious laugh. In addition to the good food, there was a wide choice of sound wines, with whisky or lager for those who preferred such drinks. We were encouraged to talk of our jungle experiences, and found in some cases that our host had actually passed through our forests on his frequent tours of the provinces, and knew the local village headmen and the conditions of their districts. He was, he told us, all against the type of officialdom which sits in an office all the year round digesting reports and juggling with statistics. He believed in seeing things for himself. One had only to close one's eyes to imagine it was an Englishman speaking, so attuned were his voice and sentiments to our own ideals.

After dinner the Prince arranged a bridge table for four of us, while the two remaining, another junior and myself, were invited to play billiards on a very good table in an adjoining room. Our host divided his time between watching each game, and seeing that we were supplied with drinks. We passed a most pleasant evening, and on the way home voted the Prince a real good fellow, one of the two senior men, who was its secretary, proposing that we should ask him to be an honorary member of the Club. The Prince expressed himself delighted at the subsequent invitation, and his visits were always interesting and refreshing. We hope he did not find us the dull dogs we found each other!

Conversation at the Club was apt to be monopolised by one or two senior men, and juniors were expected to be seen rather than be heard. I soon got tired of this perpetual "new boy" business, and could not for the life of me see why priority of residence, especially in such a backwater as the north of Thailand, should intrinsically confer wisdom and wit on anyone. Unfortunately, during a sudden pause in general and disconnected conversation, I was overheard one evening informing my junior next-door neighbour at the round table that the Chiengmai Club reminded me of the fourth form at a smaller public school! This remark was largely overheard, and I was never forgiven! In the end we juniors used to go round to each other's messes after games at the Club, and play bridge rather than stay down and listen to the local "augurs." This was no doubt good for us, but bad for the Club's bar receipts.

After a fortnight of this social whirl, I was quite pleased to be on my way out to the jungle again. The road to Melee lay through the ancient town of Lampoon, which was surrounded by a ruined wall and a deep moat full of lotus blossoms. It contained one of the most venerated temples of northern Thailand, and a large bell of great antiquity. Beyond Lampoon I travelled through a prosperous rice-plain thick with villages of which the houses were roofed with local tiles instead of thatch. A most elaborate system of irrigation enabled two crops to be grown in the year, and even now, in the hot weather, large water-wheels were creaking in every stream and canal and the beautiful green of young rice was a welcome change from the glaring yellow stubble that filled the landscape in other districts.

On the third day, after a journey almost

entirely through populated country, I entered the Melee rice-plain, which was almost as prosperous as the Lampooon valley. I was soon to find that, in marked contrast to Metum, my new forest area contained more cultivation than jungle, though such forest as there was, was surprisingly rich in teak. This kind of country had its advantages and disadvantages. Local labour was cheap and plentiful. Instead of having to import Kamus, we recruited most of our elephant riders and footmen from the local villages. Rice also was cheap and readily obtainable. On the other hand, the monthly bill for "damage to crops" threatened to be a large item. In addition to their rice-fields the villagers planted "hai" or jungle clearings, with what was called hill rice, a variety that does not need irrigation. There were also clearings in the forest planted up with bananas, tobacco, cotton or Indian corn. Many of our working elephants, hobbled and let loose to graze in the jungle, would often make for these plantations at dusk, walk through the flimsy bamboo fences, and spend a gorged and gorgeous night amongst the crops, trampling down what little was left uneaten. Next morning an indignant villager would arrive at the elephant camp with a bill for twenty rupees. Before paying up, the elephant headman had always to inspect the damage, which was as a rule finally agreed upon at about a quarter of the sum originally demanded.

Another disadvantage of these populous jungles was tusk thieving. Most of the able-bodied males of the district had at one time or another been mahouts, or at any rate knew how to handle an elephant. Our tuskers when at work were highly intelligent, but the biggest fools in the world when let loose at night in standing still and

tamely submitting to having their fine tusks sawn off by these expert thieves in return for a ball of rice or a stick of sugar-cane! Scarcely a month passed without some good bull losing one or both of his tusks, and the climax came when a fine one-tusker (called by the natives Poo Ek—Ek meaning one—) was reduced to the status of a Poo Sadaw—tuskless male! Incidentally, one-tuskers and tuskless bulls were quite common in our herds, and it is a curious fact that the leader of a wild herd was more often than not a tuskless bull. But from the point of view of timber working, particularly in rolling logs over, the loss of tusks was a serious handicap, and it took an adult male years to grow them again. I finally had to engage an ex-headman as an elephant guard, and supplied him with a Company's Snider with orders to let it off not only at sight but at sound. After he had raised the night echoes on one or two occasions, my tuskers, such as were left, were not molested.

The rains had broken and the work of the timber camps progressing well when there occurred a most annoying interruption. The area being worked by a Karen headman called Kayoh, a splendid worker and a loyal servant of the Company, was raided by a solitary wild elephant, heavily on "musth," who drove or enticed away two or three young cows from the camp and charged their riders when the latter followed them up. The camp tuskers were terrified of the stranger, and in spite of hobbles strayed miles every night. The work of the camp was so disorganised that I sent a message to Kayoh saying I would come to his camp and take a day off for the purpose of shooting the rogue.

All wild elephants in Thailand belong to the King, and it would be a slow business, involving



reference to Bangkok, to obtain permission to shoot a rogue dead. But all I intended to do was to shoot him in the leg, which would probably have the effect of driving him right away, or curtailing his activities if he remained. I still only had a light '303 rifle, but it was very accurate, as I had proved recently with barking-deer. I arrived early one morning, pitched my camp near Kayoh's, and sent him with a few men to locate the wild tusker, and then come back for me.

The "rogue" had been seen quite near the camp the day before, but as luck would have it, and just because I was there (note the "jungle cussedness" already referred to!), he could not be found. Very late in the afternoon one of Kayoh's men appeared at my tent and said the elephant was in a deserted clearing on the edge of a certain cart-road about three miles away, and that Kayoh was waiting for me by the side of the road.

I slung my rifle behind my back, yelled for my pony, jumped on it and galloped away. Unfortunately, I made a mistake in the way, and it was nearly dusk when I arrived at the appointed spot, where Kayoh was squatting in the middle of the cart-track, an ancient Snider across his knees. I hitched the pony to a tree, and Kayoh rose to his feet and salaamed. Pointing to a gap in the undergrowth of the deserted clearing, evidently made by the elephant's huge body, Kayoh whispered:

"He's in there, Master! Now that you have come, I am no longer afraid. Please to lead the way, and I will follow."

There is a kind of weed which invariably flourishes in deserted clearings which, starting as a tender green shoot, grows into a tangled network of rope-like creeper which soon renders the clearing

impenetrable except to an elephant. I have referred to it above as undergrowth, but it was well over ten feet high. The wild rogue had tunnelled into it much as a rabbit at home tunnels into long grass near its burrow. And the only way for us to approach him was to follow up his tunnel!

I glanced into this tunnel, and saw that a lot of the weed had fallen back into place, so that we would have to crawl on our hands and knees for many yards at a time. Should the elephant wind us, we were trapped. He could brush through this stuff at any speed he liked, but we could only move with difficulty. It was suicide!

I looked at Kayoh, and he smiled back with confidence and, God help me! admiration. I was a white man and, as such, possessed of a courage to which a Karen could not attain. Thus did I read Kayoh's thoughts, and then like a fool I led the way down the tunnel!

This was sheer bravado, I told myself and amounted really to moral cowardice. I was sweating, not only with fear but with the effort of fighting a way through the tangled track in damp and airless heat—for the sun had been on the clearing all day. The rogue's tunnel twisted and turned, and in one place we came across droppings still warm. I braced myself and brought my rifle as much to the ready as I could when bent double. After about a quarter of an hour the tunnel and the clearing ended—in a glade of scrub jungle where there was still some blessed daylight left. The elephant had escaped! And so had we!!

He had probably emerged from that acre of undergrowth about the time we were entering it. It was too near dark to follow him up farther that day.

And as a matter of fact, his "musth" probably slaked by a week with his temporary harem, he had made off next day, and did not trouble us again. But that was one of the narrowest squeaks I had in the course of my jungle life. Had I not missed the road on the way to join Kayoh, the brute would still have been in that stuff when we entered it. The fear of showing fear would have led me to a swift but extremely messy ending!

This phenomenon of "musth," which is by no means entirely sexual, can turn a good-tempered tusker into a man-killer.

Two tiny orifices above the cheek-bones, known as "musth-holes," exude an oily secretion, highly-smelling to elephants, which may drip into the eyes or reach the mouth, when it is regarded by natives as much intensifying the excitement of this condition. Strictly speaking, working elephants should never go "musth" if fully and properly employed. It is the duty of the rider to report the initial swelling of the "musth-holes," which occurs before any excretion of "musth," to his headman, who will at once put the animal on to harder work or tie him up to starve for a while. But elephant riders, as I well know, can be as careless and unobservant as anyone. Not long after the incident of the wild elephant, one of our Melee tuskers came on "musth," killed his rider, and took up a strategic and satisfying position in the middle of a small rice-plain where the crops were near ripening.

He was literally eating money, and the good nourishment of the rice was intensifying his condition. No one could go near him. The first night of his liberty he walked in to the nearest village, pulled down a paddy granary and a few native huts, while

the population fled screaming into the brick-built village temple, and barricaded themselves in. I was on the spot next day, and sent to another camp for a tall tusker which had the reputation of being a "taw" elephant—one used to tame wild elephants when driven into a "keddah" or corral. The rider of the "taw," in spite of the fact that his charge was much bigger than the "musth" elephant, was strangely unwilling to undertake the task of lassoing the delinquent, and I had to promise him a reward. Poor chap! It was a presentiment, for I was, all unknowingly, sending him to his death.

By the time our preparations were complete, the "musth" elephant had been located in a small sugar-cane plantation near the village which he was holding in a state of siege. The "taw" elephant, with rider and another man with a tying-chain on his back, led the way, and I followed on one of my travellers. As soon as the "musth" elephant sighted the large tusker, he uttered a squeal of rage, and charged straight at him. To my horror, the big elephant turned tail, and needless to say my female traveller was already in flight. I clung on to the girth ropes and looked back. For some reason I could never fathom, the rider of the "taw" elephant either fell or purposely jumped from his charge's neck. It was a fatal thing to do. The "musth" elephant just tore him to pieces, while we looked on helplessly. This second murder seemed to satisfy the brute for the moment. He turned round and ambled back into the sugar-cane.

That night he was in the rice again, and, worse still, had one of the camp females with him. Next day, when I was deliberating whether to shoot him, an ex-rider, suspected of being a tusk thief, came up to me and volunteered to shoot him in the leg in

such a way as to ensure capture and leave no permanent injury. He would have to have the assistance of three friends, and they wanted fifty rupees each!

This was a stiff sum, but less than the damage I estimated the elephant was doing to crops and property in a day. I agreed, provided they started work at once. They promised to have him out of the rice-fields that night, and tied up within two days. And this is how they did it.

Two of them with sickles cut a lane of escape through the tall rice and approaching the feeding elephant threw stones at him. He at once chased them, and, with a good start, they led him out of the rice-fields into some jungle near by, where their confederates were waiting up trees. These other two had old muzzle-loading guns into which they had fitted wooden arrows about a foot long dipped in some special poison they knew of. The first two men led the elephant to where their friends were concealed, and promptly swarmed up trees themselves. While the elephant had stopped and was waving his trunk up at them in helpless rage, one of the others took careful aim and shot his wooden arrow deep into one of the elephant's hindlegs just above the foot. He gave an angry roar, and made off into the jungle.

They waited up their trees the five or six hours before dawn, then carefully followed up his tracks. When they sighted him, his foot was already swollen and he was limping painfully. By midday the swelling was enormous, and he was at a standstill. Then the bravest of them climbed a tree, and from one of its branches dropped down on to the elephant's neck. The pain had conquered the

"musth," and the feeling of a strong rider on his neck made the elephant instinctively submit. It took three weeks of careful doctoring to get out the arrow and bring down the swelling. The total bill of damages for this four days' escapade, including a hundred rupees each to the families of the two dead riders, came to over a thousand rupees!

I was certainly having an adventurous season in Melee. The next excitement was the receipt of an urgent "chit" from the Burmese head clerk in Chiengmai. A senior man from the Salween was being carried by forced marches into Chiengmai desperately ill with chronic malaria. A messenger sent on in advance had given our head clerk the impression that poor old Robinson would be on the point of death by the time he reached the station. Our district manager was away in Bangkok, and I was the nearest L.B.T.C. man to Chiengmai, being only about fifty miles away. I calculated that if I could make the journey in a day, I would be just in time to attend Robinson's funeral on behalf of the firm.

The grim Salween forests, though actually within Siamese territory, were run from our branch in Moulmein, which was where their timber eventually fetched up. For hundreds of miles the Salween forms the boundary between Burmah and Thailand. The Salween forests consist of deep, well-watered valleys, above which tower steep, densely wooded hills rising to five thousand feet or more. Communications were so difficult and the forests so unhealthy that only picked men were sent there, and these received extra high pay in the form of a "Salween Allowance." In the case of illness, Chiengmai was the nearest place where there was a doctor, but the journey there was a terribly rough

one owing to the succession of hills and valleys to be crossed and the swift-flowing streams to be forded.

I started my dash to Chiangmai at dawn. The journey would normally take four days, but I meant somehow to do it in one. Unfortunately it was the middle of September, the height of the rainy season. My travellers squelched sixteen miles through mud which was so deep I had to lead my pony most of the way. We had to make most aggravating detours through thorny scrub to avoid the standing crops in the flooded rice-fields. At last we reached the banks of the Lampoon river, and I sent my "boy" into the village to try and hire a big boat.

After what seemed an interminable wait, he returned with a couple of villagers who demanded the most ridiculous price for the eighteen-mile journey down to Lampoon. They pointed out, as I could see, that the river was in full flood and still rising and that it was most difficult to control a boat large enough to contain me, servants and kit, in such a maelstrom of waters. I compromised by saying I would take a small dugout and be the only passenger, abandoning everyone and everything else. They were thus induced to come down from their original figure, but were still asking far too much. At last I had to give in, for I was, as the rascals well knew, entirely in their hands.

This haggling had already wasted valuable time, and it was far into the afternoon. I munched some food while they returned to their village to fetch the dugout. At last a crazy-looking craft, leaking in at least one place, was brought alongside the bank, and I stepped gingerly in. The men took their places at bow and stern and paddled into midstream, while I baled busily with an old tin can

I shall never forget that journey down the Lampoon river. It was almost entirely through a rice plain which was so flooded that at times the river became a lake, and it was difficult, for me at any rate, to make out the course of the channel. Flowing as it did through flat country, the river turned and twisted in snake-like bends, and it was all the boatmen could do to avoid crashing into the bank at these bends, or being washed ashore where the bank was under water. Added to this, floating logs threatened more than once to capsize us and submerged trees and snags were a constant danger. Also, I had an uncomfortable feeling, which was beginning to amount to a conviction, that the leak was gaining on my efforts to bale.

After what seemed hours of struggle, but was actually just over the hour, the pagodas of Lampoon loomed into view through the driving rain, and we drew up at a landing opposite the bazaar. I paid off the boatmen, and proceeded to try and find some means of transport for the remaining sixteen miles into Chiengmai. There was still more than an hour of daylight available. But I found Lampoon a most disobliging town. No one would hire me a pony, and I had reached the outskirts of the bazaar in my vain search for transport when my eye fell on a bicycle which was leaning up against a Chinaman's shop. I asked him if I could hire it, but he rudely refused. At the end of my patience, I grabbed the bicycle, hopped on it and rode off, with the Chinaman screaming in pursuit.

The unmetalled road was inches deep in mud, but meandering through it was a kind of track made by the bare feet of natives who had travelled the road that day. This track was about a foot wide, but its surface was not too bad, though it twisted



terribly. I had just about shaken off the Chinaman when, in negotiating one of the track's hairpin bends, I crashed into a telegraph post! He put on a spurt and was on me by the time I had picked myself and the bicycle up. There was only one thing to do. I gave him a push in the chest which sent him sprawling on his back in the mud and resumed my journey.

At last I was passing through the out-villages of Chiangmai. I had reached the little English cemetery whose graves were all too numerous considering the small white population, and was about to pass the Club. Then it occurred to me to pop in and enquire at what hour poor old Robinson had passed away, and whether any funeral arrangements had been made. My entry into the pompous precincts of the Chiangmai Club was, I fear; most undignified. The burra-sahibs were sitting round the table in white suits, while I was not only soaked to the skin, but covered with mud up to the eyes. To complete my discomfiture, there was a stranger in the company. He was sipping pink gin, and introduced himself as Robinson of the Salween!

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Another working season is over. My logs have all been delivered, my elephants are all in rest-camp, and I am taking stock down the Meping river. My tent is pitched on a broad sandbar. It is just after dawn, and I am sitting at my camp-table in front of the tent, shaving. Across the river, shrunk by the hot weather to a sixth of its rainy-season breadth, there is another broad sandbar, at least an acre in extent. In the middle of it lies a dead buffalo. They have rinderpest in the village herds, and the poor brute must have wandered there to die during

the night. It was certainly not there when we pitched camp last evening.

High up in the sky float a few black specks, circling round and round. Imperceptibly they become more numerous and begin to sink lower. Down and down they sweep round in huge arcs on motionless wings, dipping ever lower, swaying and banking, until I could see the gaps between the large feathers at the tips of their seven-foot span of wing. Now they are only a few hundred feet above the dead buffalo—a score of hideous grey shapes, floating round in ever-narrowing circles, grime and silent as befits the scavengers of death.

The buffalo they have seen from the dizzy heights a long time ago. Now they are satisfied that the scrub jungle fringing the sandbar inland holds no living thing. The silence is broken, startlingly, by the whirring, tearing whine of the wind beating against his giant wings as the first vulture zooms down like a hawk and lands awkwardly beside the dead buffalo.

This is the prelude to pandemonium. The horrible birds, ashy grey, with naked head and neck, armed with huge, curved, razor-like beaks, swoop down and close in on the feast. They rend and gobble and fight and peck at each other, uttering shrill cries and flapping their enormous wings. The buffalo is invisible beneath the grey pall of struggling, squealing ghouls. His inch-thick hide is no protection against the forceps of those lacerating beaks. By the time the "boy" brings my breakfast, he is flayed, and the climax of the feast is about to begin.

I call for my glasses, for I can see something moving at the far end of the sandbar. It is a wandering pariah cur quartering the ground. He is more

than half-starved: his back is bare with mange, and his ribs bulge out from his lean flanks. Suddenly he stops, raises his head and gazes around. He stiffens, for he has seen movement—the vultures. He canters across the sandbar and halts ten yards away from them. He sits on his haunches, snarls and growls at them. The vultures stop feeding and stare at him. He raises his nose in the air, and sniffs the delicious odour of raw, decaying meat. He and the ghastly birds remain motionless, waiting for the next move, torn between hunger and fear.

At last the pariah can bear it no longer. Coward though he is, he bares his teeth and charges forward, tentatively, ready to bolt for his life if his bluff is called. Each one of those mighty birds is twice his size, and more than double his weight. With one blow from a wing, one sweep of deadly beak or claw, they could add his lean body to their obscene banquet. Are not dead pariahs their commonest meal? How easy!—and yet, as he dashes forward, they scatter in panic, waddle away with wings outstretched, or flap heavily into the air. Hissing and chattering, they retire to a respectful distance. For this wretched, weak, half-starved creature possesses one attribute that strikes terror into the craven hearts of the carrion eaters—he is *ALIVE*!

It has been nicely prepared for him, and the pariah starts in on the first full meal his life has ever known. Incongruous in their impotence, the vultures stand round in a circle about a dozen yards away, like aldermen watching a gutter-snipe helping himself to all the tit-bits of their feast. They are silent now, waiting in an agony of impatience, watching his every movement. From time to time he glances up with a snarl.

At last he is gorged. He prepares to slink away. He growls menacingly at the ring of huge birds that surrounds him, and they hastily break circle to let him through. Scarcely has he passed than they flock on to the carcase, eager to make up for lost time.

Unless they are disturbed again, there will be nothing left of the buffalo by sunset but a pile of white bones.

## CHAPTER X

### AMONG THE HILL TRIBES

I have achieved my desire, and have exchanged the flesh-pots of Chiengmai for real jungle again.

I am in Raheng district under Ellis. I am spending the first part of the rainy season in the upper Metaw, a forest called by the river of that name whose mouth joins the Meping opposite Raheng bazaar, but whose sources are at the back of the mighty Doi Luang, forty miles inland. The forest work is being done by Karen contractors, and I am in charge of "ounging."

"Ounging" is, like so many forest terms, a Burmese word meaning to assist the movement of logs downstream by keeping them on the move during floods and preventing jams or stacks forming in mid-river. "Ounging" elephant camps are therefore stationed along the banks wherever there is congestion of logs, and must be on the *qui vive* to take advantage of every rise of the river, however small. The Forest Department had imposed a time limit of so many floating seasons, by which date all logs in worked-out areas had to be evacuated beyond a certain point, known as "extraction point." In the case of the upper Metaw, the extraction point was a gorge called Tat Noi, and at the time of my transfer to Raheng district there were still three thousand logs scattered above Tat Noi which must pass that point before the end of the rainy season, otherwise the firm would be liable to a fine of a

rupee per log. A debit of three thousand rupees, Ellis pointed out, would mean the reduction of his annual "bonus" and mine too. So he had given me his best "ounging" headman and twelve picked elephants, and told me to get on with it!

Unfortunately, he had reckoned without the weather. It was now mid-August, and so far we hadn't had a "floating rise." In another six or eight weeks the rains would be over. I had tried everything. A whole month had been spent in dragging logs down the bed of the river: but you can't move three thousand logs very far that way. It was big timber, averaging two or three tons a log, and the elephants soon tired. Then I had constructed dams here and there, floating logs through the sections twenty or thirty at a time. This was immense labour for very limited results. Nothing but a real flood would make any impression on that congested mass of teak.

There was no doubt about it: this year the rains had failed, as they do perhaps once in a decade. There had been occasional showers ever since the end of April, but nothing to cause a proper rise. To-day, August 15th, you could ford the Metaw almost anywhere without getting your knees wet. It was fantastic!

I ordered dinner. This, as usual, consisted of chicken soup, followed by chicken rissoles, followed by boiled chicken. And what a chicken! Bought, in company with three others, for one rupee from the nearest village a couple of hours' march away, it had obviously never had a square meal in its life. Mosquitoes hummed around me as I ate, and horrible fat insects collided with the smelly kerosene lamp, and fell sprawling on the camp-table. It was an oppressive, depressing evening.

After dinner, Maung Shwe Lah, the Burmese elephant headman, came round to my tent, salaamed, and squatted down on the edge of the canvas groundsheet. I was quite prepared for a "pow-wow," for it was far too hot to sleep. One generally goes to bed after dinner in the jungle: there is nothing else to do!

Maung Shwe Lah was such a perfect pessimist that he always cheered me up. He regarded this abnormal season as just the kind of thing that *would* happen to him when he had been put in charge of the finest elephants in Metaw. I was expecting a really good grouse about the weather and the malignant forest spirits responsible for it. Instead, he was actually beaming:

"Master," he began, "I give orders to tie the elephants up to-night, all ready to keep the logs on the move. The river will rise!"

"You must be mad, Shwe Lah," I retorted. "There hasn't been even a shower for three days, and there were no big clouds in the sky to-day."

"I know, Master, but this afternoon I have been down to the village. I find all the people in the temple praying for rain. They cannot plant their rice for lack of water, and soon it will be too late, and they will starve. So I go into the temple, and pray with them. After a while, a young priest brings in a very holy father, an abbot who is on pilgrimage in these parts. He kneels before the altar of the Lord Buddha, and prays in silence.

"Then he rises to his feet, faces us, and says:

"Have no fear, my children: the Lord is sending you rain. Before to-morrow's sunrise your fields will be flooded so that you can plant your rice. Go

and fetch in your ploughing buffaloes, for the Lord has promised.'

"Master, he is a most holy monk, and the villagers all believed him; they streamed joyfully out of the temple and into the fields to find their cattle. I too believe him, and with your honour's permission have made preparation for the rise."

I saw it was best to humour him.

"All right, Maung Shwe Lah," I said. "Tie the elephants up if you wish. But see that the men cut them plenty of fodder, and loose them at dawn if there is no rain."

He salaamed, and left me. I turned in.

It was not so stuffy now, and there was even a faint suspicion of a breeze. I went to sleep at once, lulled by the sound of the Metaw, only a few feet away, gurgling over its stony bed. In my dreams I heard the sound of distant gun-fire (or was it thunder-claps?). But there was no doubt about what woke me up at four in the morning.

To me, after weeks of waiting, it was the most musical sound in the world—the hollow boom of log striking log which means the beginning of a "rise." Leaping out of bed, I dashed from my tent, and flashed my torch across the swirling waters. The Metaw was up three feet, and logs were on the move!

Running back into the tent, I hastily dressed and came out again. There was still no rain, but I could see lightning flashing round the summit of Doi Luang, six miles away, where the Metaw rises. It was raining there right enough. Suddenly a mighty wind swept down the valley. A death-like silence followed—even the waters of the Metaw seemed hushed—then down it came!



Tropical rain has to be seen to be believed, and this particular downpour was long overdue. It seemed as if the gods were emptying colossal buckets from the sky. It beat on my helmet, battered my back, choked and blinded me, leaving me gasping for breath as I struggled up the river-bank to join Shwe Lah and the elephants at their camp by the gorge.

I slipped and slithered continually. My hob-nailed boots could get no grip on a surface that was being rapidly washed away. The light of my torch could hardly penetrate the vertical rods of water that seemed to join earth to sky. The going was still more dangerous where the mud gave way to rocks, for to slip into Metaw now meant certain death.

The river was still rising, though not so quickly as I had hoped, and there was not much timber coming past. As I struggled on, I turned my torch on the water from time to time. The level seemed stationary, and presently it actually began to drop: logs had ceased to come down altogether. This was astonishing, in view of all the timber above the gorge. Suddenly I understood. The fall in the level could only mean one thing—a jam!

It was only a mile from my camp to the gorge, but it took me nearly an hour to get there. Fighting my way along the narrow track that fringed the bank, under that pitiless curtain of rain, every step was a peril. In some cases the bank had been washed away, and I had to make a detour over slippery boulders and treacherous tree-roots. At last I heard the shouts of men and the rattle of drag-chains. There was nervous trumpeting as my torch picked out the ghostly forms of the elephants, looking monstrous against the background of night.

"We are just going upstream to find the jam, Master," shrieked Maung Shwe Lah through the storm.

"Carry on, I'm coming with you," I yelled back.

I followed at the tail of the rumbling, jingling procession. I was safe now, for the elephants would never put a foot wrong. They can see in the dark as well as any cat, and feel with their trunks to make sure that the surface ahead will bear them.

The first fury of the storm was now over. Half-way up the gorge the darkness turned to grey: the black boles of the trees began to stand out. Then suddenly it was dawn, and a hundred yards upstream loomed the jam.

A solid wall of timber, fully twenty feet high, stretched from bank to bank. At the foot of the wall the water was only three or four feet deep, but upstream behind it a vast lake had formed, into which logs were still pouring from above. Nothing could be done in this deep water. Any elephant venturing in would be swept down, sucked under the logs, and drowned.

To attack the jam from in front would be almost as dangerous. What was needed was dynamite, but unfortunately Ellis had not sent any out to the forest. And so the minutes slipped by, and the Metaw's record rise was being wasted under our very noses, with twelve first-class elephants standing by helpless. It was no good hoping that subsequent floods would put matters right; it would take months to pull that stack down and clear the river for floating. I was almost in despair when Maung Shwe Lah spoke.

"Master, it is a fearful risk, but I have one elephant here, Poo Bua, who I think could do it. His mahout is a brave man. Somewhere at the base of that stack is one key-log, which is holding up the whole lot. Poo Bua is very clever: I believe he could find it. Also, he is very quick on his feet for an elephant. Will Master give the order?"

Here was a terrible dilemma. Poo Bua's value was a good deal more than the three thousand rupees we stood to lose at present. I went over and patted his immense cheek, and he rumbled with pleasure. Then I looked up at the cheerful little Karen on his neck.

"Well, Pah Lay," I said, "what do you think!"

"We can do it, Master," he replied quickly.

Something in his eagerness decided me, but I could not let him go alone.

"Make him kneel," I commanded.

With a grunt Poo Bua flopped to his knees, and I clambered up on to the girth-saddle behind Pah Lay.

"Hold tight, Master."

The elephant slid down the bank, and splashed his way, girth-deep, to the base of the jam. Then he slowly worked his way along the foundations of that towering wall of logs, his trunk continually groping, feeling and rejecting: he seemed to know exactly what was required of him. Less than half-way across the river, he appeared to have found what he was seeking. His trunk disappeared under water, wound itself round a projecting log, and he began to pull. Pah Lay uttered words of encouragement, but kept his eyes fixed on Maung Shwe Lah on the bank, who was watching the stack intently.

Poo Bua pulled again, and the log began to loosen. There was a cracking sound, and Shwe Lah yelled:

"Come out!!"

Pah Lay shouted a command: Poo Bua released his hold on the log and dashed for the shore, thrashing his way through the water with incredible speed. Looking up, I saw the whole mass of logs trembling, and as we scrambled up the bank the dam of timber burst!

It was a sight I shall never forget as long as I live. With the roar of an avalanche the stack broke loose and gathered speed. The escaping floodwaters billowed and boiled into foam. Logs weighing tons were tossed into the air like so many corks; in spite of their huge girth, many were snapped in two like matchwood. But all of them were on the move, and for over half an hour a solid mass of timber streamed past. The rear of the riotous procession was brought up by an immense cotton-tree, which had fallen from its undermined bank into the river, roots, branches and all.

Sliding down from Poo Bua's back, I shook Maung Shwe Lah by the hand. The situation was saved: the three thousand logs had passed extraction point, there would be no fine, and we should get our bonus after all. I might even get promotion! And all this was due to the intelligence and skill of a single elephant!

As for the hero of the occasion, he stood on the bank, flapping his huge ears, idly watching the logs race by. Pah Lay had given him a stick of sugarcane as a reward, and he was munching it with vast satisfaction. The cotton-tree disappeared round the next bend of the river, and the elephants squelched back to camp.

Later on in the season, when the rains were over, one of the Karen contractors, or foresters, as we called them, called at my tent early one morning to say that one of his elephants had been stolen! As his timber was nearly all delivered, he requested permission to stop work and take all his men in pursuit of the thieves, who were heading for the Burmese border. I readily assented, and wished him luck.

Jokes have appeared in *Punch* and other papers on the subject of stealing elephants, stressing the absurdity of getting away with such bulky "swag," but unfortunately, as in the case of tusk thefts, the job presents few obstacles to the expert thief. In forests near the Burmese frontier, elephant thefts were common in the old days, but in the recent years have been largely stopped by the use of the acid brand on the animal's rump. This is more or less indelible, and does not wear off in time like the old iron brand.

All that is required in stealing an elephant is a good start of the pursuing owner. He will almost certainly use other elephants in the chase, and one of the methods of slowing up his pursuit was to conceal bits of buffalo hide studded with sharp nails along the track. This will certainly lame the owner's elephants, and further increase the thieves' advantage.

Away beyond the Raheng hills, a thickly forested pocket of Burmese territory formed a salient into the Siamese border. This area was a favourite retreat for elephant thieves. Here they would hide their captures till the brand had worn off, and the hue and cry died down. It was important to catch up with the thieves before they reached the border,

and I am glad to say my Karen forester did so. Disdaining transport, he and his men, armed with rusty old "gas-pipes," followed the tracks on foot, and came up with the four thieves, all riding on the stolen elephant, on the third day. The Karens fired a ragged volley, and the thieves tumbled off the elephant and disappeared into the jungle.

The next rainy season I spent in the dreaded Mewong. I was the only European who had ever been required to superintend "ounging" there in the wet season, but here again logs were getting congested and it was thought that the camps had been left to themselves too long. Ellis considered I was quite acclimatised enough now to stand a rainy season in the evergreen, and he had given the headman instructions to make a clearing in the forest, and build me a substantial jungle bungalow.

Mewong was the farthest forest from headquarters in the country, and it took eleven days to reach it at that time of year. The march was almost entirely through evergreen jungle, and for the first time I had the unpleasant experience of leeches in my tent. This was about four days out from Raheng, and my "boy" had pitched my tent over a carpet of fallen leaves, and laid the canvas groundsheet over them. These leaves were literally alive with leeches, who soon burrowed their way out from under the groundsheet and advanced towards my bare legs almost in columns of fours, waving their obscene, questing heads in the air until they had scented the right direction, then doubling like caterpillars towards their prey. There was nothing for it but thoroughly to clear another site near by, surround it with a ring of ashes from the cook's fire, and pitch my tent anew.

Another item to the debit side of Mewong occurred during that ghastly journey. I awoke one night with a pricking, tingling sensation all over my head, to find my hair a mass of tiny black ants whose pincer-jaws were nearly a third the size of their bodies and could nip quite painfully. I turned on my torch, and yelled for the "boy," who arrived, gave one look, said nonchalantly "Motngam," and went away again. I could see with my torch that a whole column of them had entered the tent, travelled across the groundsheet, climbed up the metal struts of my camp-bed, and were all over my pillow. The line of march was still intact when the "boy" arrived back from the servants' tent armed with a broom and half a dozen rags soaked in kerosene. First of all my bed had to be shaken out and remade, what time I combed the little pests out of my hair. Then they were all swept out of the tent, and the kerosene-soaked rags tied round the feet of the bed, an inch or so above the groundsheet, for, said the "boy," these "mots" (ants) will never cross kerosene. He was right: I was not disturbed again, and ever afterwards these precautions were taken nightly *before* the enemy's columns had advanced to the attack.

A day or two before reaching Mewong we broke out of the evergreen into a small plain of grassland, quite uninhabited (indeed, we had scarcely met a soul on the whole journey), but a relief, I felt, from the twilight of the forest. My tent was pitched, and it was pleasant to be able to sit in its shade and see a mile or so ahead. But when evening came, there was disillusion and disgust. The place was alive with sandflies, the tiniest creatures with a bite more painful than any mosquito. We were soon all in agony, and I had to have my mosquito net (the

meshes of which were easily penetrable: by these minute horrors) taken down, and the sandfly net put up. This was practically plain linen cloth, which kept out the sand-flies but did not admit any air. I spent a sleepless, sweaty night, and awoke with a headache.

The rains had broken in full fury, and the dank, dripping evergreen, the mud underfoot, the swollen streams we had to ford, the steamy heat, combined to make that march to Mewong the most unpleasant journey I ever undertook in Thailand. I was just about "fed up to the teeth" when at last I entered the large clearing in the centre of which rose a big bamboo-and-thatch bungalow, my forest headquarters. The Burmese elephant headman of the "ounging" camps advanced to meet me with a salaam. I returned his salute, and looked at the bungalow. It was already occupied. I could see a dirty-looking Siamese woman cooking on the verandah.

"Why do you allow villagers to camp in my quarters?" I demanded of the headman sternly.

They are not villagers, Master. It is Maung Po Chone, the rider of the man-killer, Poo Noi, and his wife."

Seeing anger in my face, he hastily added:

"They are not there with my permission, your honour. I told Po Chone that bungalow was built for you, but he would not listen to me."

This was the last straw. I had been prepared to find a lack of discipline in the camp—it is, for instance, a rule of the Company that only headmen are allowed to have their wives with them in the forest—but here was impudence transcending all limits.



I strode across the clearing to the bungalow, and ran up the steps. Men from the elephant camp near by, sensing a row, had come out of their quarters and were standing about staring up at the bungalow. Maung Po Chone was evidently almost as feared as his elephant. Arrived on the verandah, I shouted at the woman squatting over some cook-pots: "Where is Po Chone?"

From an inner room—*my* bedroom, if you please—a villainous-looking Burman shuffled out, and stood before me blinking uncertainly—he had evidently been asleep, and at midday too.

"What do you mean by using my bungalow?" I said.

"Take that" (a cuff on the ear that sent him reeling), "and remove yourself, your woman and all your kit out of here. When you have finished doing that, get some Jeyes' Fluid from the headman" (we used to keep it for cleaning out sores on elephants), "a bucket of water, and a scrubbing brush, and go down on your hands and knees and scrub every inch of this bungalow until it's fit for my habitation."

Walking to the edge of the verandah, and kicking a few pots and pans over it as I went, I shouted to the headman so that all the camp men could hear:

"When the travelling elephants arrive, have my tent pitched over there. My bungalow has been befouled by this dirty rascal, Maung Po Chone, and he will spend the rest of to-day, and all to-morrow disinfecting it to my satisfaction. Until then, I camp in my tent."

There were not a few smiles of satisfaction on the men's faces. Po Chone was evidently no favourite. By now he had finished, with the aid of his wife, getting all his stuff out of the bungalow, and had started scrubbing the verandah, in full view of the camp. This was a good beginning, but I decided to punish him further.

In the evening I went up to the bungalow to inspect him at work.

"This is no good, Po Chone. You are not putting your back into it. You are evidently not used to hard work. You may go now, but to-morrow you shall work under my supervision."

With a half-scowl, he shuffled off to the camp. Next morning I had my chair and camp-table taken up to the scrubbed portion of the verandah, called up the headman for a talk about the state of the work, and paid up the camp. The men came up one by one to receive their money, while Po Chone never stopped scrubbing and washing the floors and walls with disinfectant. About midday he said he was tired and hungry, and asked if he could have a rest.

"Certainly not," I replied. "You must go on till the whole bungalow is finished."

About two o'clock I expressed myself satisfied, and said I would move into the bungalow next day, giving it time to dry. Po Chone limped away, stiff with the bending and unaccustomed hard work and apparently thoroughly cowed.

That night after dinner my "boy" came to me in a state of alarm, and said that Po Chone had told him not to be surprised if Poo Noi, his man-killing elephant, came wandering around my tent during

the night. Poo noi had a worse reputation than the Payao Poo Kum Tun, so my "boy" suggested he had better move my camp-bed up into the bungalow at once. I saw this would be just what Po Chone wanted, to give me a fright and get some of his own back. So I told the "boy" to tell Po Chone that on getting his threatening message I merely laughed aloud.

In the middle of the night I *did* hear Poo Noi's iron bell, which dangerous elephants wear instead of the ordinary wooden clapper, but it was on the opposite bank of Mewong. I remained on the *qui vive* for some minutes, but the sound came no nearer. I concluded that Po Chone had thought better of it!

I found a large congestion of timber in the Mewong, and the cause was obvious. Just by the camp the Mewong, a good-sized river about fifty yards wide, suddenly divides itself into half a dozen tiny channels which wander through a maze of elephant grass and reunite about three miles downstream. The logs had got stuck in these tiny channels, which were too small and winding to float them even on a rise. It would take the whole of the season to drag them down these channels, so drastic methods were called for.

Taking my compass and plotting board, a gang of coolies with knives and axes, and an elephant whose rider was armed with a long "parang," I went down to just below where the channels joined up, and set a course for the elephant camp, where most of the logs were stuck. The jungle was the densest evergreen, but we gradually drove a tunnel through it, the man on the elephant clearing the overhanging creepers while the men on foot cleared the ground. On the second day this road came out at

the camp, to the amusement and surprise of the men. It was a mile long, and dead straight, and after being properly cleared it formed quite an imposing avenue through the evergreen. I was proud of my new drag-road.

The logs were now all dragged out of the various small channels on to the new drag-road, and down it to the main Mewong where it was once more a river. Before the rains were over all the timber was delivered to this point, but without this new short-cut road we should never have got the job finished.

During this first part of the rains, there was a lot of dysentery among the men. I dosed them liberally with chlorodyne, and nobody died, but I felt myself lucky not to get it myself. During the later rains, when we were mostly under water, malaria was rife in the camps and also among my own servants. Once again I escaped, and began to congratulate myself that I was now really acclimatised. This was lucky, for to get really ill in the lower Mewong would have been the end of me, as communications were completely cut off by the floods.

While the logs were being dragged, I used frequently to walk down the new drag-road to see the elephants at work. On returning to camp one day, I noticed the tracks of a tiger following and in some places superimposed on mine in the soft-mud. The tracks ended in the elephant grass country, out of which the tiger had commenced his trailing of me. How near he was to me in point of time or sight I was not expert enough to read from the tracks, but after that day I carried my revolver in my belt. Mewong was full of tigers, but the rainy season was

not the time to hunt them. Ellis had bagged all his in the hot weather.

Walking down my drag-path another day, I suddenly heard a great rumpus among the elephants, roaring and trumpeting, and the shouts of the men, and a riderless female came dashing up the track towards me, followed by others. Next I met a thrown rider running after his charge, and he shouted as he passed me "Hornets, Master!" Soon I reached the scene of the stampede. High up in a tall resin-tree was a round object considerably bigger than a football—a hornets' nest. The tree grew just by the side of the drag-path, and it appeared that an elephant dragging a heavy log had bumped it into the base of this tree and so shaken it that the hornets were disturbed, and their scouts had swooped down on the elephants and stung them into bolting. From then on these dangerous insects—a dozen stings would send a man into a torpor—were so menacing that we had to cut a detour of our drag-path, which was an annoying waste of time. Finally, two of the camp Kamus offered, for a reward of five rupees each, to destroy the nest. They climbed the tree with huge resin torches in the middle of the night, and burnt the pests alive. It was a hazardous venture, and, I felt, cheap at the price.

By the beginning of September the logs had, partly by dragging and partly from the aid of small rises, made several miles' progress down-river. The forest was still dense evergreen and completely uninhabited. It was also, unfortunately, dead flat. In the middle of September the Mewong had a record rise, and soon the whole country was under water. I awoke one morning to find the Mewong creeping into my tent, and we hastily pulled down the camp and put all the kit on the tops of huge ant-hills of

which, luckily, there were many near by. Then the men got to work and erected a bamboo platform about five feet from the ground, and on this my tent was pitched. Other platforms were made for the servants' and coolies' tents. These preparations were made only just in time. The flood waters were rising rapidly, and the men were soon wading about in three feet of water. We were marooned in this camp for a week!

We were now some miles from the bungalow which had been so useful for the first part of the rains, and where the rice supplies were kept. The water was now too deep for the men to carry the rice in baskets, and my travelling elephants were requisitioned for rice transport. The riders had the greatest difficulty in tracking their charges when let loose to graze. To watch a rider thus engaged was interesting. Instead of walking along with his eyes glued to the ground, he would wade with his eyes fixed on creepers or branches of trees above him, to see where the animal had grazed.

By the end of a week I was just about sick to death of my camp in the flood waters. I was cut off by a tributary of Mewong from the elephant camp, so there was nothing to do except watch the water rising slowly, inch by inch, and wonder if it would reach my platform. There was nothing to do, and I had nothing to read. Worse still, I had run out of cigarettes, a fresh supply of which were due by mail runner, who of course was marooned if not drowned somewhere *en route* from Raheng!!

At last the waters began to fall, and in a few days the Mewong was flowing once more within its banks. The whole forest was now inches deep in slime and mud, and the stench of rotting vegetation

was almost unbearable. The men began to go down with fever, and at last my own "boy" was so ill that when I had dosed him into convalescence I decided to put him on an elephant and send him across country to Paknampo. His place was taken by a coolie, Ai Kayoh, who seemed a clean, smart youth, and learnt his job quite well.

Unfortunately, he was more than smart. I was out all day with the camp elephants, dragging stranded logs back into the river and pushing them downstream, and did not get back to camp until evening. I had been riding one of my travelling elephants because of the mud underfoot, and for that reason had not taken my revolver with me. On returning to my tent, I found my teakwood specie-box had been broken open with an axe, though it was still left chained and padlocked to my camp-bed, and a bag of money containing about seven hundred rupees, which was all I had left, had been taken away. Half a bottle of whisky had been drained, and, worse still, my rifle and revolver were missing. Taking the camp headman and two mahouts with me, we soon picked up Kayoh's tracks in the mud on the outskirts of the camp, and followed them up.

Darkness was falling, and it was eerie work tracking the thief through the dim forest. Would the effects of half a bottle of whisky embolden him to put up a fight if we closed on him? Drink usually had a maddening influence on natives, and perhaps he was waiting behind a tree to pick us off as we stooped over his tracks. But night put an end to the problem. We could no longer see anything, so the only course was to get back to camp and take up the chase from that spot next morning. Unluckily, there was a tremendous thunderstorm

during the night, which completely washed out the tracks, so, for the time being, Ai Kayoh got clean away.

The sequel was interesting, and speaks well for the Provincial Gendarmerie, while throwing a sidelight on Siamese law, which is based on the Indian Penal Code. After about a year, Ai Kayoh was captured. Eventually a good deal of light was thrown on his movements after the robbery. He had spent the night up a tree some five or six miles from the camp, but within earshot of a remote jungle village in the lower Mewong, which from there downwards was beginning to be inhabited. He had kept up his courage during the night by firing off my rifle until the clip was empty. Whether he had subsequently thrown it away or sold it was never known, but when I was camped at a village in the "bad-hat" area of lower Mewong, a mysterious scallywag came to my tent one night and said that if no questions were asked and a reward of ten rupees promised he could produce my rifle next day. I decided to promise the reward, and next evening my shady friend produced the rifle, none the worse for a month in other hands, pocketed the reward, and shuffled off into the night.

As to the bag of money, Ai Kayoh said in evidence that he had carefully thrown it into the Mewong next morning, at a spot he thought he could subsequently identify, and intended to recover it at a suitable opportunity. But he swore that he never found it again, either because he had made a muddle of the place, or because, which was most unlikely, someone else had found it. On the whole it seems likely that the bag was never recovered.

I had reported the robbery first to Bangkok, as the Raheng road was still under water, whereas a



messenger could get across country or down-river to Paknampo. When the trial came on in the Paknampo Court a year later, Kayoh's defending counsel pleaded that there was no case for trial, as the prosecutor, myself, had not informed the *local* authority within the statutory three months which are allowed in which to report a robbery. Our evidence was all taken down on commission, and sent to the International Court in Bangkok. A foreigner's natural ignorance of the whereabouts of a local authority when in the middle of the jungle was finally vindicated in the Appeal Court, and Kayoh got three years. Incidentally, when arrested, he was found in priest's clothing in a local temple, where he had been hiding for months!

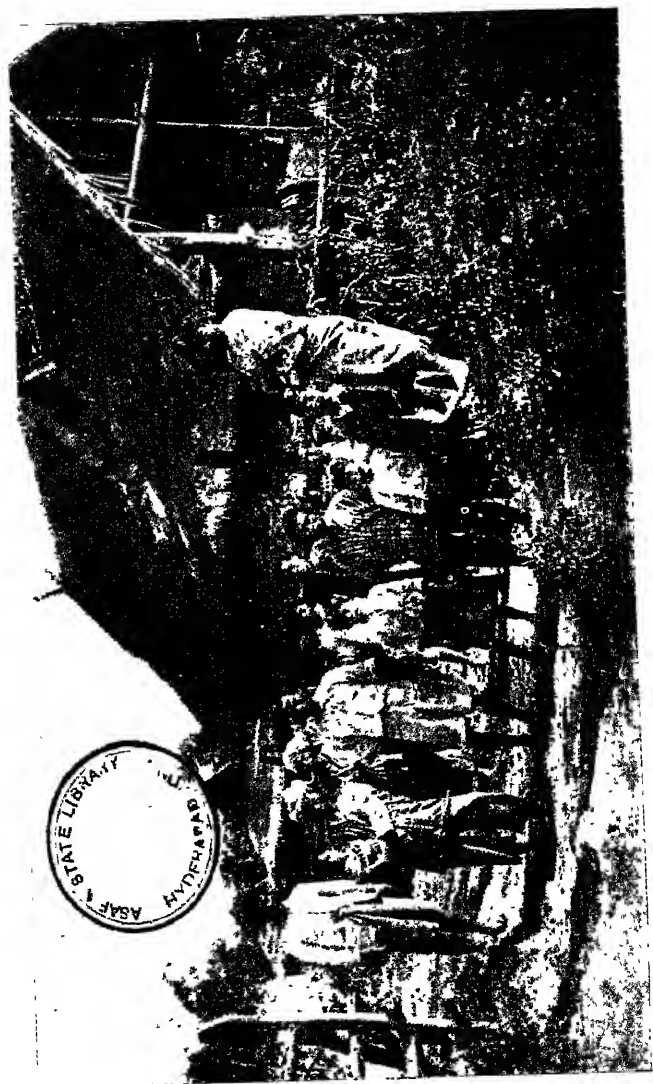
My next disaster was the death of one of the camp elephants, a thin female who, in spite of being rested, seemed just to waste away. I decided to hold a post-mortem. She was lying on her side, and in order to get at her internal organs, a coolie had to hack her ribs off with an axe. The vast quantity of the animal's entrails nearly made me sick. I discovered eventually that the walls of her stomach were covered with a kind of hookworm, a blood-sucking internal parasite present in such quantities as in itself to cause persistent anaemia, if not the cause of death. All the elephants were looking tired. I put it down to lack of fodder in the evergreen during flood time. Later on, after having found other cause to sack the headman, I found that, left to themselves owing to the great distance from Raheng, they had never been into rest-camp, but spent the hot weather on the banks of the Meping dragging house-posts for local villagers at so much per log! Two other elephants died before the season was over, and the failure to go into rest-camp was no doubt the cause.

The rains were now over, the logs well placed for floating in the lower Mewong, so I returned to Raheng preparatory to doing another trip in Metaw. All the timber delivered by the Karen "foresters" had to be measured before the Karens were paid up. It was a great change tramping up and down the hilly roads of Metaw after the monotonous level of the Mewong evergreen. The Karen villages were on the very tops of hills, and their rice clearings irrigated from tiny hill-streams in the most ingenious way by a system of water-pipes made from the giant bamboo. They are handsome but, like all hill tribes, a dirty race. The men wear bright turbans and home-spun "sarongs," the married women an embroidered jacket and striped homespun skirt, while the unmarried girls wear a single garment, a kind of white smock with short sleeves and a V-shaped neck with red collar. These girls are as shy as deer, and darted into the jungle whenever they met a foreigner on the trail. An amusing incidence of their timidity occurred while I was camped on a fallow rice-field near one of their villages. I was having tiffin in my tent after measuring some logs, and "Billy," my wire-haired terrier was sitting at my feet. (Billy deserves a chapter to himself, a saga of his epic fights with his natural enemy, the village pariah.) Across the field in front of my tent an old Karen woman was returning to the village, followed by half a dozen virgins in their long white smocks. So far, so good; but presently a pariah cur brought up the rear of the procession. He had lingered behind on some business of his own, and was now trotting after his mistresses to catch them up. This was too much for Billy, who had pricked up his ears as the cur came into view. With an angry bark, fiercely out of proportion to his size, the furry little fiend charged.

Whether the girls, who had certainly never seen an animal like this before, thought he was some kind of polecat, I don't know: but they undoubtedly mistook his attack as directed at themselves instead of their pariah, who was already streaking, tail between legs, into the horizon. Lifting up their only and one-piece garment high above the waist in order that it should not encumber their retreat, they broke into a gallop! They were fair-skinned girls, and the parts normally covered by the smock fairer still. I had the impression of half a dozen full moons disappearing into the distance!

Besides the Karens, whose racial origin is a matter of some controversy, there were other hill-tribes living on top of these ranges dividing the Meping and the Salween water-shed. There were Yaos, Miaeos, and Museh, all these being definitely of Chinese origin. Most of them, but especially the Miaeos, grew the white poppy from which they made opium, and sold it to Lao middlemen who smuggled it into the towns. The hill-tribes themselves used opium, as we use tobacco, and with as little effect. But the plainsmen, if they smoked opium, became addicts, and were soon good for nothing. Hence the Siamese Government had prohibited it except for registered Chinese opium shops, which were allowed a certain quota. The drug became so expensive that a small fortune awaited the successful smuggler, and much of the time of the Bangkok Police and the Provincial Gendarmerie was spent in detecting and tracking down opium smugglers.

At last I had finished measuring all the Karen contractors' timber, and they all trooped into Raheng, armed to the teeth, to be paid up. The stench in the office on the morning of their settling accounts



“ The Karen villages were on the very tops of hills ”



was dreadful, for they do not often have a bathe. They did not argue over any item of their accounts, for they were impatient to get back to their hills. "Walking about on the level," one of them told me, "makes my legs ache so"!

## CHAPTER XI

### THE FOUR RIVERS

I am now a District Manager myself, in charge of all the Company's rafting. Based on Paknampo, which is where the Meping and Meyom join to form the Menam Chow Phya, I have to patrol these two rivers and their tributaries, the Mewung and Menan, as far as rafting limits, which are roughly the limits of navigation. This rafting business is an entirely different affair from other jungle and station jobs. To begin with, we are right down-country and only about a hundred miles north of Bangkok. The work is almost entirely statistical, and consists in supervision of the measuring of rafts both for sale and for paying the Government royalty and duty, apart from which there is an immense amount of office work. I am housed adequately and can travel in comfort. But I soon miss the exercise of jungle life, and sometimes sigh even for a spell of girdling!!

For transport I have been given a shallow-draught motor houseboat called the *Dawkmai* which has an engine of 24 h. p. and its propeller in a tunnel, enabling it to draw less than eighteen inches of water. The length is thirty-five feet and the beam seven feet; there is a cabin with mosquito-proof windows and electric light, a tiny bathroom aft, and an awned-in top deck to be shared with the steersman. The *Dawkmai*, in fact, has been specially designed for these shallow and swiftly-falling rivers and does her job very well.

From the European point of view, Paknampo was a small-sized station, as the rafting managers of other firms were stationed higher up the rivers, and only came down from time to time, while the Forest Officer was an English-speaking Siamese. But to the Siamese it was an important city. It was the capital of a province, and the headquarters of an Army Division. My work brought me a good deal of contact with Siamese officials, and I soon found they were keen and generally good tennis players. There was a hard court in my garden, and it was not long before I began to give tennis parties to the higher officials, and was invited in turn to play at their club.

The first officials whom I met in the course of their duties were the judges. There were any amount of timber theft cases in the courts, and I was always being called on to give evidence as the technical owner of the logs. Our clerks would find a log bearing our hammermarks, which had drifted or been cut from a raft, hidden in a villager's garden, or being sawn up under his house, and the man would be arrested and charged with theft. The court did not understand the workings of the teak business, as was shown when prosecuting counsel asked me.

"When did you miss that log?"

As the rafting area was about a hundred and fifty miles up one river alone, and about fifty thousand logs had arrived in rafting waters that season to date, I found some difficulty in answering that question!

While waiting for my cases to come on in the courts, I often took occasion to listen to other trials. I was courteously accommodated with a seat near counsel, and heard some very interesting cases.



Naturally in this district of "bad-hats" there were a good many dacoits up for trial. A murderer's name was always prefixed by "Ai Seua," which means "Tiger." This was not only the common but official designation, and was a proof of the Buddhist abhorrence of taking life. One morning when I was in court, one of these "Tiger-men" came up for sentence, and was condemned to death. He heard his fate with a broad smile, salaamed to the judge, and walked jauntily from the dock. Later I heard he showed the utmost nonchalance at his execution.

Though I never witnessed a Siamese execution myself, one of our senior consuls, who was present in an official capacity, the prisoner, a Pathan, being a British subject, described the procedure to me. Executions generally take place in the heavily sanded courtyard of a deserted temple. The walls of the precinct are lined with gendarmes, and there is a small group of official witnesses. In the centre of the compound is a small stake, no higher than the small of the prisoner's back as he squats in front of it, blindfolded, and with his hands tied behind him to the stake. He has been very liberally doped with opium.

Behind him stands the executioner, in elaborate ceremonial robes, a long, silver-handled "dah" in his hand. To salve his Buddhist conscience, he has also been primed with opium, but not sufficiently, as a rule, to disturb his aim. The traditional method of execution involves a long and intricate ceremonial dance, the climax of which is the fatal cut, though several feints or "air shots" are customary. As the executioner wandered away from his victim in the mazes of his dance, approached him with a whistling sweep of his "dah," then tip-toed away again, my friend told me he felt a most uncomfortable sensation

in the pit of his stomach. Finally, the consul frankly shut his eyes, thanking his stars he was wearing dark glare-glasses, and would not be noticed!

One evening the General commanding the Division brought three of his young officers to play tennis. The General himself was in uniform, and looked very smart in his well-cut tunic and slacks. After the game I complimented one of the young officers on his activity about the court.

"Ah, yes," said one of his friends, "Nairoi (Captain) Tong Sook is very fast, he can run a hundred yards in seven seconds!"

"Really," I murmured politely, but hesitatingly. "But I thought the world's record was over nine seconds?"

"But you see," replied his friend instantly, "the Siamese are very swift!"

Though they were as scrupulously polite and just as friendly as the civilian officials, I could detect in army circles a distinct nationalist feeling, which revealed itself as much as anything in a boundless self-confidence which did them great credit. In later years, as I shall describe, the army became impatient of the administration's alleged foreign sympathies, and finally more or less took over the government in a series of comparatively bloodless revolutions. In view of later developments, I found my Paknambo contacts with the army distinctly interesting.

On another occasion I was invited by the Lord-Lieutenant of the province to an official dinner held in celebration of the King's birthday. I was the only European guest, but several prominent Chinese merchants were invited. To my horror, I found there were speeches after dinner (which was a seven-

course affair on the European model) and that I was expected to reply for the guests! By this time, however, after so much intercourse with Siamese officials, my vocabulary was sufficiently improved to make the ordeal, when it came, quite a light one, and by carefully choosing my words I managed to thank our kind hosts without mispronouncing one of those five dreadful tones!

My most interesting contact with the Siamese ruling classes also occurred in Paknambo, when I was actually presented to His Majesty King Prajadhipok, who had succeeded his brother Vajiravudh on the latter's death a few years previously. Incidentally, the House of Chakkri, founded by a successful general, now all adopt the name of Rama for official use, King Prajadhipok being Rama VII. The King and Queen were starting on a tour of the Northern provinces, and the royal train was due to stop at Paknambo station for the General and the Lord-Lieutenant to present their staffs, as well as the prominent local merchants, to His Majesty. I received an invitation from the Lord-Lieutenant to be present, and noted with dismay that the time of the royal train's arrival was two in the afternoon. This was about the hottest time of the day: I should have to wear tails and a white tie, and very much doubted whether my stiff collar and boiled shirt would not melt on me before my turn of introduction arrived! Knowing I should have to stand in the open or under a very thin awning, I had to add a white but incongruous "topee" to my attire!

By spending the time of waiting in the courteous station-master's office, where a cool breeze from the Meyom blew through an open window, I managed to keep my stiffness of collar and shirt intact. At last the royal train was signalled, and I took my

allotted place under a cloth awning between a crowd of army officers and civil officials. As the train steamed in,

"Look!" exclaimed an army officer near by. "The engine is driven by a 'farang' (European)." There was pride in his voice.

As the engine stopped near us, I took a good look at the driver. I had an idea the army officer was exaggerating!

The central royal saloon was a beautiful coach, painted white in distinction to the buff of the rest of the train. At a central window, beneath which the royal arms were emblazoned in gold, stood a slight figure whose inscrutable yet benevolent features reminded one of an image of Buddha, His Majesty King Prajadhipok. The resemblance was strengthened by the fact that a party of priests seated on the ground opposite the royal coach broke into a religious chant. As the train came to a standstill a party of soldiers clattered out of the next coach and formed a guard with fixed bayonets on either side of the royal window. Then the presentations began.

After the officials had been introduced, an apparently private individual, carrying a golden bowl such as are used in giving offerings at a temple and from which protruded a rolled piece of parchment, knelt down in front of the King, who took the parchment, and handed it to an official in the coach. It was evidently a petition, and proved that direct access to the sovereign was by no means frowned upon in this absolute monarchy.

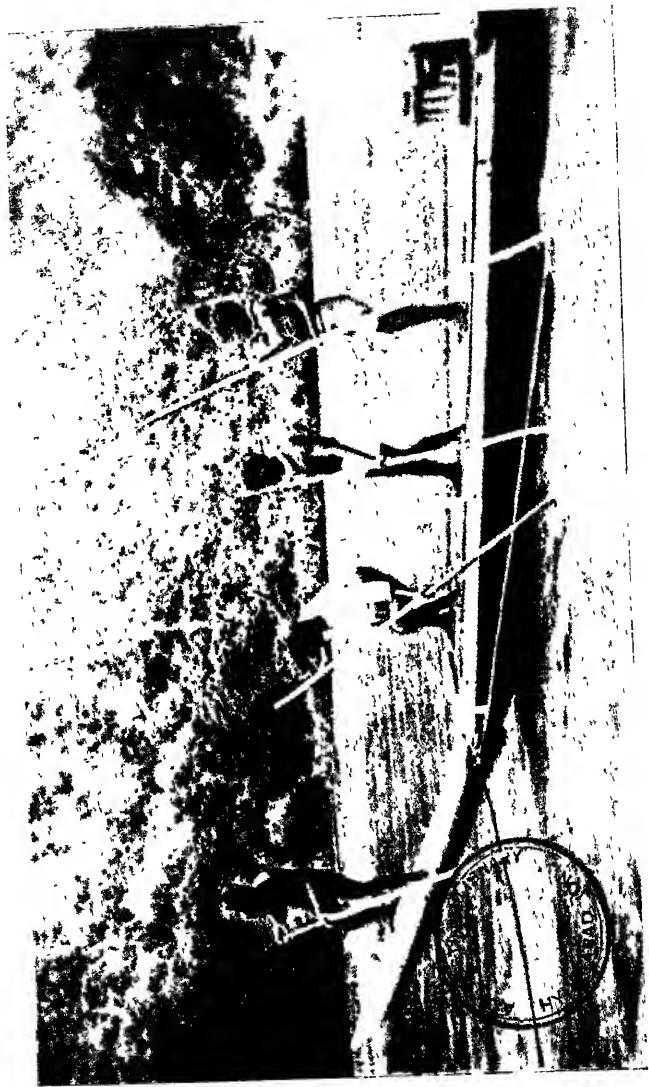
After I had made my bow, I was beckoned by a figure just descended from the train who wore the uniform of a General. It was H. R. H. Prince

Purachatra of Kampengpet, whom I had met at home. He shook hands and chatted affably for a few minutes. I felt my stock with the local dignitaries rising quite considerably!

The presentations were over, His Majesty took the salute of the guard of honour, and the train steamed out. My last sight of it was the observation car at the rear, where one of Prince Purachatra's staff was busily filming the route with a ciné-camera.

Fortunately for me, I was frequently away from the steamy heat of Paknampo on up-river inspection. Up the Meping, whose shallows and uncertain channel I had experienced on my first trip up-country, the *Dawkmai* had to be tied up at night, in spite of a good searchlight. But up the Meyom and its tributary Menan, I was able to travel all night. These rivers were winding and narrow, but quite deep. The Meyom was apt to be dangerous at times of high flood owing to whirlpools forming at its more hairpin bends. A heavily loaded native launch was sunk at one of these, and a Chinese passenger, who would not leave go of his cashbox, was drowned. On another occasion, when going downstream after a sharp bend, the *Dawkmai* found herself heading for one of these whirlpools, in which a few stray logs were bobbing about like corks. By superhuman efforts, the steersman managed to wrench the wheel round, and we skimmed the outside of the whirlpool without being sucked in. But it was a dreadful moment!

In its lower reaches the Meyom wound its tortuous way through an alluvial rice-plain. It was a strange sight when looking across the paddy-fields to see the tall funnel of a steam launch apparently moving on land. It reminded me of Chichester



An upcountry boat in northern Thailand



Harbour, and the masts of Dell Quay, seen from a distance, rising out of a cornfield!

The height of the rafting season was a hectic time. Although provided by the Bangkok Mill with three steam-launches and a towing motor-boat, we had to work at full pressure to receive the big up-country rafts, measure them, and then re-make them into smaller rafts in order to comply with the harbour regulations of the Port of Bangkok. Measuring timber on the ground up-country was always a hot job, but measuring rafts was far worse. The sun beat down on the water and was reflected up into the eyes, compelling me for the first time to resort to glare-glasses. Also, I was now about three hundred miles nearer the equator than in Chiangmai.

Paknampo, among other amenities, possessed an aerodrome! I am afraid, like many aerodromes in Thailand, it was only used in the hot weather. In the rainy season it was one of the best snipe-grounds I ever shot over! In addition to the snipe on the aerodrome proper, its outskirts of grassland and thorn thicket held quail and francolin, while a little farther in the surrounding jungle teemed with jungle-fowl. I was thus able to get some very good rough shooting while on the rafting job.

One day two young Harvard boys blew into my office to ask advice about a cross-country trek across from Raheng to Moulmein. They had been told in Bangkok that I had recently done that trip myself. They had just left college, and were on a trip round the world before settling down in their respective fathers' business. One lived in New York, the other in Chicago. I invited them to stay a couple of nights with me while I made arrangements for their journey. Their own idea was to walk the sixty-odd



miles from Metaw watershed to the Burmese frontier without camp kit or servants, sleeping at resthouses on the way. It was lucky for them they consulted me, for I was able to point out that, on the Siamese side at any rate, there were apt to be no villages at the appropriate stages, and that such rest-houses as there were, were very primitive affairs. I wired up to Raheng and asked Ellis to engage a few carriers and a cook-boy. In the end they had quite a good trip, and they ended up at Rangoon with an experience that gave them great delight, one of them being arrested as a communist agitator, being mistaken for a certain gentleman wanted by the police, to whom he was said to bear some resemblance! While these two young men were with me, I took them a trip up-river, and also took them out snipe-shooting at which one of them soon proved remarkably adept. Such little as I was able to do for them was much more than repaid, in the fashion of American hospitality, when I in my turn visited the States.

At the beginning of my first hot weather in Paknampo, we had a bad outbreak of cholera. It gradually spread up-river, and reached our main river elephant "ounging" parties from Raheng engaged in dragging drift logs back to the river. It had been arranged that when they reached my area I should go up and inspect the parties and pay up the men. There was one man missing when the pay-roll was called, and I was told he was suffering from slight indigestion. However, he eventually turned up to get his money, and seemed all right except that he was breathing rather heavily. This was about six o'clock in the evening. He was found dead on the sandbar a few hours later. Fortunately, none of the other men caught the infection and I moved the camp away from the main river until the epidemic was over.

In comparing my present job with my previous jungle life, I voted on the whole for the latter. True, I was enjoying many of the amenities of civilisation, the work was most interesting, and the contact with Siamese officialdom both pleasant and instructive. But, like the Karens, I began to miss the hills of the north, the scent of forest flowers and the healthy exercise of constant marching and riding. I had got used to moving about and sleeping in a tent. However, there was one great advantage in the rafting business. There was no work to do after February until the monsoon broke, so I was granted six weeks' short leave! There came a day when I closed up the office, and took train down to Bangkok, *en route* for the Burmese hill-station of Maymyo.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE ROAD TO MANDALAY

EVERY time I went down to Bangkok, which was very rarely, I noticed changes, due to the city's rapid growth. There were now quantities of motor-cars and lorries in the streets, and there were khaki-clad policemen on duty to control the traffic. More hotels were being built, better and larger shops opened, and the metropolis grew more modern every day. The crowd at the Sports Club was gayer and more cosmopolitan than ever, and even the British Club had quite a genial atmosphere. All the import firms seemed to have doubled their European staffs, and the foreign firms were doing good business.

It has been remarked all over the world how keenly, for instance, a German firm will study the needs of its customers, and what a casual take-it-or-leave-it attitude is too often adopted by the British exporter. As far as one could judge from the shops, Bangkok was no exception to this rule. In a British store the white assistants would attend to their own people, leaving Eurasian or Siamese to look after the Siamese customers. This was no doubt due to the language difficulty. But go into a German shop and you would find the German assistants speaking fluent Siamese and attending personally to a Siamese customer, who would be flattered by the trouble taken over him. And the shop would be filled with just the kind of goods a Siamese would be likely to buy. No doubt our methods are improving, but it was

easy to see in Bangkok what a lot we could learn from continental salesmanship. As to the Japanese, both Bangkok and the up-country bazaars were flooded with their cheap goods. In every town of any size the local photographer was always a Japanese!

The railway was now through to Penang, having linked up with the railway system of the Federated Malay States. But on the Siamese side the trains were not yet running at night, and one stopped the night at a quite clean and comfortable railway rest-house. From Penang I caught a British India boat for Rangoon, the voyage taking four days.

In Thailand it had always been impressed upon us by our "higher command" that we were in a friendly and entirely independent country, and that we must on no account ever strike a native. This rule we mostly managed to adhere to, but in my case it was apt to break down on the very rare occasions when insolence was shown and intended. I was very much amused therefore by an incident which occurred as our ship drew into our wharf in Rangoon river. A wide space had been railed off by movable barriers to keep out the crowd of Tamil porters who would otherwise rush the gangway. There was a small entrance guarded by a khaki-clad British sergeant of police. In his eagerness to get a job, one of the Tamils crept into the forbidden area behind the sergeant's back, and made a dash for the ship. Before he had gone many yards the sergeant caught sight of him out of the corner of his eye. In a trice he had wheeled round, cut him off, and sent him spinning back through the entry with the most beautiful flying kick I have ever seen outside a football ground! At last I was in British territory!

I was much impressed with the vast size of Rangoon, which after all was the third biggest port in British India. The down-town bazaars positively teemed with gaily-clad humanity. The Burmese women dressed rather like the Laos except for a distinctive way of doing their hair, which was coiled in cylindrical shape on the top of their heads instead of into a knob at the base of the skull. The men wore a voluminous kind of "sarong" called a "loongyi," and bright-coloured silk turbans round their heads.

In one respect Rangoon differed enormously from Bangkok. Although one did see an occasional Chinaman, their place in Rangoon as labourers was taken by the Tamils or Klings as they were called, lean, black, hawk-nosed southern Indians whose standard of living was so low that even a Chinaman could not compete. Compared to the Chinese, they were most unpleasant-looking people. There were representatives of every race and tribe of British India, but the Klings were the most numerous.

My first night in Rangoon I was taken to dine at the Pegu Club, where a good meal was served by efficient, English-speaking Madrasi "boys", who were generally preferred down-country to Burmese servants. The butler of our Rangoon mess had engaged a Madrasi to look after me during my stay in the country, and he proved a very good servant, being expert in laying out dress clothes for the evening, the wearing of which I found at first terribly irksome in the Rangoon heat. Although farther from the equator, it seemed a much hotter place than Bangkok, possibly because the buildings were more crowded together.

The first sound of a Rangoon morning is the cackle of the myriads of crows that infest the city.

Worse, far worse than the kites of Cairo, they are everywhere, and have even invaded the suburban gentility of the cantonments quarter. Their hoarse cries and perpetual bickering seem to add to the heat of a flaming day. They are the boldest of thieves and the filthiest of scavengers, yet nobody in Rangoon seems to mind them. If I were in authority in that city, I feel sure I should organise a campaign of extermination against *corvus impudens*. But I suppose in the East you get used to anything.

The mail-train for Mandalay and Maymyo steamed out of Rangoon station. It was not a corridor-train like those in Thailand: I was told this would be too dangerous on account of thieves and other criminals. Also there was no restaurant-car, the train stopping for meals at wayside station buffets. At dusk an armed Sikh policeman boarded the train. Up to that time we had travelled through a vast, arid plain, and the heat, in spite of the electric fan in the compartment, was enough to make one uncomfortable.

In the morning I awoke in time to appreciate one of the major triumphs of railway engineering. Mandalay had been left away on our right, and we were halted at the base of a range of hills about four thousand feet high. Right above us I could see the steam of a shunting engine. Then we started to climb. The railway track zig-zagged, with occasional short tunnels, right up the face of the hill. Our speed was often reduced to walking pace, but we climbed steadily up, and could sometimes see from the carriage window a section of track over which we had already passed lying several hundred feet below us. It was getting gradually cooler as we climbed, and we were greeted on the plateau, the summit of our ascent, by quite a fresh breeze. The train resumed normal speed, and at the first station

we stopped at Shan peasants were offering for sale baskets of wild strawberries!

At Maymyo station I am met by one of the firm and driven in a cheap American car to The Chummery! After my Bangkok experience of a mess called by this hearty name, I am full of forebodings. But here all is different. Whether because all the occupants are on holiday or whether there is more "esprit de corps" in Burma, I do not know: but I am at once made welcome and to feel at home. The mess is a large brick house covered with a kind of ivy (this and the strawberries make one feel home-like already) with a fine entrance hall and a broad staircase leading up to a gallery off which open the various rooms. There is a large fireplace in the hall, and I am told it is very necessary in the cold weather. After a bath and a change, I am ready to be taken down to that centre of hill-station life, the Maymyo Club.

If Rangoon cantonments remind one of Upper Tooting, the residential quarter of Maymyo might be Weybridge or Woking! Built in the English style, complete with chimneys (a rarity in the East), surrounded by spacious gardens, with hedges of pine or fir, the houses might belong to a successful City man. But rounding a corner, we are once again reminded of our distance from the banalities of suburban Surrey, for we meet a scarlet-coated, turbaned, jack-booted Bengal lancer, one of the Governor's body-guard, sitting his horse as if born in the saddle, a gay pennant fluttering from his spearhead. He is no doubt taking a message from His Excellency to some lesser luminary.

At the Club, at the pre-tiffin apertif time, nearly half the men are British officers in their well-cut

khaki. In the hot weather Maymyo is the centre of government, and there is always a battalion of a British regiment stationed here as well as several Indian Army regiments. As we enter the bar, our party from The Chummery is hailed by a group of soldiers, for in Burma the "box-wallah" is by no means taboo. In fact, in alliance with the juniors of the military, we are apt to organise midnight raids on the pomposity of the heaven-born I.C.S.!

The presence of the Army is no doubt a good influence. Their discipline and self-control, I feel, would scorn association with native girls, however virginal. But youth and gallantry must be satisfied, especially in the tempting atmosphere of a tropical hill-station, so often fatal to frail females. And so *affaires* of varying intensity are not unknown. More often than not, no harm is done, and it is better than propagating half-castes, like the Portuguese in Goa and the Dutch in Java.

We leave our cards on the Governor and the General, and in due course are invited by His Excellency to a ball at Government House. This is by no means a stodgy affair, and we all enjoy ourselves immensely. The popularity of the Governor very often depends on the personality of his A.D.C. In this case we were lucky, and Government House did a lot of entertaining. On another occasion there was a garden-party, and guests were given their choice of tennis, or a round of golf on the miniature course in the grounds. Those who chose the latter were presented with the loan of a small Burmese caddy complete with a set of the necessary clubs.

One of my new-made friends was in the Burma Rifles. There are no Burmese in this regiment,



except perhaps a few in the band. The rank and file are hill tribesmen from the north-east frontier, stocky little Kachins of Mongolian features not unlike the Ghurkas. Very smart they looked in their khaki uniform and a khaki turban of the shape and size they wear in their native hills. They make such good little soldiers that it was proposed to give them a turn of the real thing on the north-west frontier. I have no doubt they would acquit themselves well.

I was loaned some polo ponies from a man in the Burma Military Police who was on leave. The idea of this corps could well be adopted in Thailand. If a district shows excessive figures of violent crime, a detachment of the B.M.P. is quartered on the district until matters improve. They round up all the bad-hats, make love to all the pretty girls and generally induce the local elders to put their house in order. In Thailand, on the other hand, you would have a province like Ratburi or Nakon Sawan where a handful of gendarmerie were struggling to suppress gangs of dacoits, while thousands of soldiers quartered in the same district were doing just nothing.

In addition to polo, there were mounted paper-chases organised by the Governor's secretary, a hard-riding little Welshman in the Indian Cavalry. We galloped over the bracken-clad slopes of this immense plateau, and always, at about half-way time, we would fetch up at a shady tree under which was laid out a table covered with food and drinks and presided over by uniformed "chuprassis." At one of these meets I saw a very senior Englishman call up his Burmese "sais" (the "saises" were mostly Indians) and, probably because there was something wrong with the saddlery, publicly cuff him over the ears. Never shall I forget the look of shame and hate on

the face of the lad as he slunk away. Burmese, like Malays, are very easily wounded in their *amour propre*, and I often wondered if this "sais" ever took some form of revenge. While I was at Maymyo, a Burmese "boy" in some up-country forest, smarting under some real or imaginary grievance, killed his master and some of the other servants before committing suicide. The Siamese, though they too cared for their dignity, were not so apt as the Malays or Burmese to "run amok." They had much more sense of humour!

There was a lot of dancing, plenty of games and every kind of relaxation and social life in Maymyo. We had nothing like it in Thailand. And yet most of the mess at The Chummery were up in Maymyo under doctor's orders, recovering from malaria, dengue, dysentery or some other curse of the jungle. The truth is that although Burma could provide the amenities lacking on our side, the Burmese jungles were more evergreen, much wetter and more unhealthy than the comparatively dry forests of Thailand. Some of them were even more inaccessible than ours. I was reminded of these aspects of comparison in the train back to Rangoon, after a month of glorious holiday. There was a forest officer in my compartment who had been seen off at Maymyo by a weeping wife. He was returning to some damp down-country forest, from which he had come up to Maymyo on a month's sick-leave to convalesce after malaria. We had left Maymyo scarcely an hour behind when the poor fellow began to shiver in the agonies of ague. I covered him with blankets, and at last he went off to sleep. He would be all right in the morning, he had said. But I knew, and he knew, that nothing but Home could cure him.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ON "SHIKAR"

EVERY man is born with something of the hunter in him, and I found sufficient of the "shikari" in myself to be thrilled even on a blank day. You may have drive after drive with nothing shootable coming out, yet there is always the excitement of anticipation, and to a keen naturalist the interest in observing the smaller creatures and birds which are bound to appear. Thailand is supposed by some to be a paradise for the big-game hunter, but this is only true of certain remote and inaccessible districts which few have the opportunity of visiting. I am speaking of a few years ago when I say there are no game laws in Thailand, and every jungle native has a "gas-pipe" and knows how to use it.

I was sitting in our office at Raheng one morning when the clerk showed in a Lao villager with a bamboo carrying-pole across his shoulders at each end of which hung a bison's head recently shot. One was a bull's head, the other that of a cow. The bull's head was a magnificent trophy, and the late owner must have stood nearly six feet at the shoulder, a few inches, of course being accounted for by the dorsal ridge. I asked the Lao how he had got them, and here is his story.

"There were a party of six of us, Master, who all knew how to shoot, but our guns are very poor compared to Master's. We came up with the bull the first day, and one of us wounded him slightly

somewhere in the middle of his body. He made off, and we followed him up, and when we sighted him again he charged. *So we all climbed up trees.* At last he went away, and we followed him up again, and got in another shot. Every time he charged we got up trees, and this went on for *five days*. At last one of us wounded him in the foreleg, and he could no longer charge. After that it did not take a lot of shots to finish him off. Would Master like to buy the head to hang up in his bungalow? Only five rupees!"

He seemed surprised and crestfallen at my very curt refusal. I was thinking of the horrible fate of that grim, game old fighter, whose silver curls at the forehead contrasted so well with the chocolate brown of his cheeks. The sky-blue eyes were glazed, and there was a little blood on the white muzzle. Then I asked our sportsman how they got the cow.

"Oh, we ambushed her in a pass," he said half-contemptuously, "and killed her at five paces with one volley!"

So this is how these magnificent cattle, the largest in the wild state in the world, are gradually being exterminated in Thailand.

The "tsaing" or red cattle have slightly more chance of survival. They are not confined like the bison to the high evergreen, but roam through the deciduous jungle, with which their khaki coats harmonise perfectly. They are much more wary than the bison and very cunning in their choice of a lie-up. Coming down a main ridge one day, it suddenly dipped to reveal, about eighty yards below me, a knoll carpeted with the dry leaves of a small bamboo clump which afforded a little bit of shade. I would rest under this, I thought, when suddenly

the dry leaves sprang to life. I had a momentary impression of tossing horns and waving tails, but before I could get my gun to my shoulder they were out of sight on the downhill side of the projecting knoll. Out of sight, but by no means out of sound, for I could hear them galloping down the hill-side and up the opposite slope. There must have been half a dozen of them: they had chosen a spot for their midday siesta that commanded the ground both above and below them as regards any intruder, and a perfect background for camouflage.

My only bison I had the astonishing luck to sight crossing an open glade in the evergreen about three thousand feet up. I had with me a heavy shot-and-ball gun, which at the moment had a No. 4 cartridge in the right barrel and a soft-nosed ball in the left. I was crouching down behind some bushes, and a Kamu coolie squatted behind me with my cartridge bag. Fearful he would have crossed the glade before I could substitute another ball for the No. 4, I let him have the left barrel, but got him too far back in the flank. Instead of bolting, to my astonishment he ran up and down with his nose in the air, for all the world like a village buffalo spoiling for a fight on the paddy-fields. At last he thought he had got the wind right, and charged. Meanwhile I had turned round to my Kamu for two more ball cartridges, slipping out the spent one and the No. 4. The Kamu lost what might have been a valuable second by fumbling. His eyes were staring and his mouth wide open with fright. The bull charged diagonally across my front from left to right, and taking the most careful aim I fired. But on he went, and we came out and followed. He disappeared, stumbling, over the edge of the ridge. When we got to the spot, we looked down a

twenty-yard lane of completely flattened vegetation, at the bottom of which the bison lay dead on his side. I had got him through the heart this time, but he had gone for nearly two hundred yards, fortunately in the wrong direction. Wind eddies play strange pranks at these heights. He was not a specially big bull, standing about five foot nine, and his head is not one of the best. But I am very proud of it!

I had a more exciting experience with two tigers at Palao, in Payao district, although safely up a tree. On the outskirts of the village, we had a rest-house built, as they often are, on the top of a small hillock which sloped sharply down to a little glade bordered with tall grass. I had the luck to arrive at Palao the morning after a village buffalo had been killed by tiger. They had hardly had time to do more than take a bite or two off the rump before daylight set the village astir. And, luckier still, it lay in the little glade under the shadow of a big tree whose roots were some yards up the slope of the hillock. I told my men to make a machan at a certain height on this tree, and ordered tiffin.

It is never safe not to see that orders are carried out. I proposed to go up the machan well before dark. When I came down the hill at four o'clock, I found the machan had been made much lower than I had directed. As far as tiger's leap was concerned, it was safe from the ground, but by no means safe from the hillside above. However, it was too late to do anything now.

A hurricane lamp was hung from a branch of the tree to illumine the kill when night came. It was the hot weather, when trees are often smouldering and burning high up, so it was hoped the tiger would

notice nothing unusual. I sat in the quite comfortable machan through the heat of the late afternoon. The dead buffalo stank abominably. I began to wonder whether I could stand it for hours on end. There were vultures in the top branches.

Leading from the jungle to the little glade was a half-overgrown path covered with dead leaves. One has always understood that a tiger approaches its kill in deathlike silence. It was just beginning to get dusk when I heard the sound of a heavy body trampling the dry leaves of the jungle path, and out of the long grass slowly walked a magnificent tiger. He went up to the kill and sniffed at it. At that moment the sound of distant bells announced the approach of a belated bullock caravan to the village near by. The tiger raised his head towards the sound, and I fired.

The leap he gave, half sideways, half backwards into the long grass was incredible. Then silence. Had I killed, wounded or missed him? Only the morning would tell. Then suddenly it was dark, and the lamp burned brightly over the kill. The stench of the dead buffalo was sickening. I settled myself down to sleep. I was just dozing off, when a great beating of wings aroused me. High up above me a vulture had fallen off its perch in the tree-top. This happened several times before they and I finally got to sleep.

It must have been about one in the morning when I was awakened by a deep terrifying growl which seemed to come from the hillside *above me*. I jumped to my knees, grasped my rifle, and peered into the darkness of the hillside, which was outside the range of the lamplight, determined to sell my life dearly if the tiger leaped on to the machan.

After a few breathless and most uncomfortable moments, my attention was distracted from the hill-side by a low growl which came unmistakably from the neighbourhood of the kill. The head and shoulders of a tiger appeared through the long grass on the other side of the dead buffalo from which the first tiger had approached. The tiger looked straight up at me, then commenced eating the buffalo's rump.

Was the first growl which seemed to come from above me an echo, or a fault of hearing of my half-awakened state? Or was there yet a third tiger on patrol? The tiger went on feeding, glancing up from time to time. Of course it could not see me through the lamplight, nor, I flatter myself, had I made a sound. But, though only its head and shoulders emerged from the long grass, it was plainly uneasy. Perhaps it suspected the light was artificial. At last it took a firm grip of the buffalo's rump and pulled. Incredible as it may seem, the huge carcass began to move. Now there was only the tiger's head to aim at, and as I fired it too disappeared.

After that I felt pretty sure of not being disturbed again, and went to sleep. Soon after dawn, my "boy" and a few villagers armed with guns came down the hill with a ladder, and I got down. My lungs seemed full of the aroma of dead buffalo. We went cautiously along the hillside to another tree, which commanded a view of the long grass into which the first tiger had jumped. My "boy" swarmed up the tree, and to my great delight shouted, "Tai layoh" (It is dead!)

There was no trace of the second tiger, and I am sure that, in my excited state and with only the head to aim at, I missed it clean.



As to the dead buffalo, I asked the villagers, who soon swarmed to the scene, why it had not been corralled at night like the rest of the village herd. I was told that this old bull was supposed to be able to look after itself. It had been attacked by a tiger more than once and come off none the worse except for a few scratches. The gallant old brute had only succumbed, then, to a dual-attack.

I had not yet finished with that buffalo. While I went up to the rest-house for some breakfast, the men skinned the tiger. It measured nearly nine feet from nose to end of tail. Then we moved camp, and by nightfall were a good fifteen miles away. As I sat in front of my tent before dinner, I began to smell that dead buffalo more strongly than ever. I seemed to have had whiffs of it all day. Was a night of inhaling decay to turn to a permanent affliction? I called my "boy" to the tent.

"Tong Dee, can you smell dead buffalo?"

"Of course, Master," he replied. "After skinning the tiger, the Kamu carriers cut up the dead buffalo, divided it up into small portions, and are even now cooking it for their evening meal!"

"Well, before they go any farther with their cooking, make them move their quarters at least three hundred yards away."

While a European would have died of dysentery, it is a fact that none of those Kamu carriers got even a "tummy-ache!"

My first sambhur came out of a drive. It was trotting away to my right through some trees, on the last one of which I drew a bead preparatory to its head and shoulders appearing. Rather luckily, I got

it clean through the neck, and it was kicking its last as I ran up to it. While examining it for the bullet hole, I was much puzzled by a completely circular open scar, about the size of a half-crown, on the spot which in a man would correspond to an "Adam's apple." When the beaters came up, they told me all sambhur stags have this disfigurement. They called it *mange*, and for all I know may be right.

I have already paid tribute to the gastronomic excellency of the sporting little barking-deer, or muntjac. On a night of full moon you can always hear that dog-like bark which never deceives a dog. Mine would always growl in return, whereas the baying of a village pariah left him contemptuously silent. The little buck seems to be giving a free advertisement of his presence to every tiger and leopard within earshot, yet their numbers never seem to decrease and almost every jungle valley holds at least one.

I never had any luck with leopard, but saw one and heard another, or rather its victim. The latter case illustrates the well-known boldness of the leopard. I and another white man travelling in the opposite direction happened to meet and camp at a "*sala*" or rest-house, a substantial teak building raised on piles, on a certain main road. Behind, and only a hundred yards from the rest-house, rose limestone cliffs no doubt honeycombed with caves, good shelter for wild animals. After a couple of sherries, we had both ordered dinner. This meant a good deal of clapping of hands by the "*boys*," and shouted responses from the cooks. In fact it was the noisiest moment of the evening. Underneath the "*sala*," at one end, the mahouts were cooking their evening meal, and making merry over it. In the middle of the open space under the rest-house, and

not far from the mahouts, a village pariah was nosing for scraps.

The soup was just coming in when both A. and myself were startled by a yelp of fear from the pariah under the "sala". In a second there was a howl of pain about thirty yards away, and in another a muffled screech in the distance. Meanwhile the mahouts underneath were yelling blue murder. We sent a "boy" down to investigate, and it appeared that a leopard had dashed in almost under the noses of the mahouts, seized the pariah and made off with it. Dogs are, of course, a very favourite tit-bit with leopards, and there is on record the case of a jungle-wallah whose terrier was taken out of his tent.

In contrast was the behaviour of the only leopard I ever saw, though I have often heard them "coughing" in the jungle. It was very early morning, and I was on the march. The elephants were still being loaded, but my cook had already gone on a couple or three miles ahead to make breakfast. Breakfast on the march is one of the pleasantest meals in the jungle. You have walked or ridden to it, get it at a reasonable hour, and when you feel hungry. The alternative is to have it at the crack of dawn while your tent is being pulled down. Anyhow, here I was, strolling along a typical jungle path, with my two terriers, but unfortunately without a gun. There was a "nullah" on my left and a ridge on my right. Fortunately for them, the two dogs were at heel. Suddenly, not ten yards ahead, a leopard darted up from the nullah, crossed the path, and disappeared over the hill. I don't think, had I a gun, I *could* have missed it! By the way, there are purists who maintain that the animal is a panther in Asia and a leopard in Africa.

Tell it not in Hindustan, but I have shot at a wild boar! It came out of a beat, and its huge unwieldy body that seemed all head was travelling so much quicker than it looked to be that I missed it behind the tail!

I have already told of the bear and its short sight. We have almost exhausted the big-game, except for extreme rarities like the Indian rhinoceros and the tapir. There are no wild buffalo proper in Thailand, the herd in Mewong being almost certainly descended from abandoned village cattle. There are brow-antlered deer in Tak and the north-eastern provinces, but *the* big-game prize of Thailand is Schomberg's deer. It is almost certainly extinct, but the annoying thing is that its horns keep coming down to Bangkok from Paknambo and Korat by railway amongst collections of ordinary deer-horns consigned to Bangkok Chinamen. This, although the horns are probably quite old, is apt to encourage the belief the Schomberg's deer still exists, and every now and again some hopeful "*shikari*" spends time and money in a vain search for the animal.

Big-game shooting, then, is largely a matter of luck, but anyone who is reasonably keen can enjoy small-game shooting almost all the year round. The best of this kind of sport is undoubtedly given by the snipe. And it is quite a long season. The earliest snipe I ever got was, most curiously, shot on the twelfth of August, and the latest on the twenty-fourth of April. But they are not really numerous before October or after the middle of March. From the marshes of Siberia and North China they come down in their countless thousands to feed on the tepid ooze of tropical rice-swamps. You can have grand sport when the young rice is about eighteen inches high, or in the tall stubble

after the reaping. The sedge round the margin of a "jheel" is almost always a favourite feeding ground.

In the rice-fields the snipe is a fastidious feeder. You may tramp for miles over crops that stretch away to the horizon without putting up a bird, then suddenly find them thick in a patch of rice that does not seem to differ, to our eyes, from the surrounding paddy. Furthermore, the snipe will always return to these favourite spots. Birds missed or put up out of range will circle the horizon at a good height, then suddenly swoop down in wisps of perhaps half a dozen at a time, affording some pretty overhead shots.

The best bag to a single gun up-country was made by a friend of mine in an out-of-the-way swamp near Chiangmai. He got thirty and a half couple in a morning for an expenditure of a hundred No. 8's. Much bigger bags, though perhaps not a much better proportion of hits, have been made farther south when the late rains have flooded the rice-fields and the birds have been driven to higher ground. Then the fallow and grass-lands, wet for about this fortnight of the year, are simply alive with snipe.

Excellent sport is obtainable all over the country throughout the late autumn and winter months: but I cannot leave the subject of snipe in Thailand without recounting the perfectly true story of S.'s first snipe. (S., by the way, is now a very good shot.) S. and T., two Bangkok "office-wallahs," much too early in the season, and without having sent out a scout to report prospects, decided to spend their Sunday shooting at a little place about twenty miles down the southern line. The morning local duly deposited them, their guns and cartridge-bags and provisions, at a tiny station in the middle of a vast rice-plain. They

divided the country, each taking one side of the railway line. After an hour, T. decided that his half of the horizon was entirely devoid of snipe, and returned to the railway rest-house for meditation and cold beer. T. was a fair shot, and he rather envied the "novice's luck" of S., whom he had heard firing almost from the word "go."

To return to S. He put up a solitary snipe in the first ten minutes. He missed it, and the snipe went down about two hundred yards away. He followed it up, it duly rose, he missed it again, and once more it went down a similar distance away. And so on. At intervals of his slumbers throughout that blazing day, T. heard the crack-crack of S.'s gun. At last, just before the evening return train to Bangkok was due, S. came back in triumph holding up a single snipe. *There was not a mark on it!* It had died of fright!

The next migrants of interest are the ducks. They begin to arrive in October, when huge flights may be seen driving arrowlike across the sky, heading steadily southwards. They are mostly pintail, but mallard, pochard, widgeon and teal are also on the way. In fact most of the European wild duck, not to mention two or three species of geese, will be found in a season's bag. And how different is duck shooting in the tropics from the sport at home. Instead of crouching knee-deep in a half-frozen ditch waiting for a wintry dawn, one is being paddled in a rickety dugout through a tunnel of tall reeds in an atmosphere made stifling by the midday sun. It is a large jheel, but except for a couple of acres in the centre is nothing but reeds and papyrus grass, through which we push and cut our way for more than half an hour. At last the green gloom brightens, and we are nearly in open water dotted with

pink lotus. But we remain just under cover, and are rewarded by the passing by, within easy range, of a small flight of teal. Our right and left bring a couple down, and then begins the fun!

At the sound of our shot, the water is beaten into the thunder of a thousand wings as huge flights of duck and teal rise from all over the open parts of the jheel. They circle round and round, and for glorious ten minutes our barrels get hotter and hotter. Then the various flights begin to stop the danger zone, and circle higher and higher until out of sight. But scattered individuals who have lost their units give us spasmodic sport for another quarter of an hour. At last it is all over, and the jheel is quiet. We paddle out into the open and retrieve a mixed bag of a dozen couple, which include mallard, common and garganey teal, an unwelcome shoveller, a widgeon and the rest pintail. We are covered with sweat, and still trembling with the excitement of one who has discovered an unshot jheel. We may visit it again in a few days' time, but it will never hold such numbers as to-day.

There are two other migrants that find their occasional way into the lucky bag, the golden plover and the woodcock. The former are fairly rare, but the latter, though not numerous, are almost a certain find in any area where they have been noted the previous year, as they seem to favour certain localities. In contrast to the snipe, which is easier to hit in the tropics than at home, as he doesn't jink so much, the woodcock is very difficult to bag as he glides swiftly and silently into covert. It is a red-letter day when we add him to our spoils.

The seasonal migrants by no means exhaust our opportunities of sport. There are native birds, some

of which are shootable all the year round, such as quail, partridge, jungle-fowl and various kinds of pigeon. The commonest of the quail is the tiny little button-quail, no bigger than a sparrow, yet there is no mistaking his whirring flight for anything but that of a game-bird. He has an annoying trick of falling to the shot whether hit or missed, causing much search over ground from which he has long escaped by running.

The best of the partridge family is the handsome francolin, not unlike a grouse in appearance, but found singly or in pairs. The rising cadence of his call is a feature of the hot-weather scrub jungle, but he is terribly difficult to flush or drive. Other partridges, like the various kinds of native peasant, live in such dense evergreen that they are seldom seen.

Jungle-fowl are a great source of sport, and can easily be driven. In appearance they are exactly like the "moorghis" of the remoter villages, but a swiftness and stealth of motion on the ground, and great speed on the wing proclaim them game birds, as also the succulence of their flesh compared to the cook's chickens. They can rocket as well as any home pheasant, and often appear in large flocks.

The evening flight of the green pigeon to and from the salt springs gives some of the best shooting in the jungle. Then there is the large Imperial pigeon, whom it will take a No. 4 to bring down, and who must be long hung, as he is tough. Altogether, the man who shoots in Thailand gets a grand variety, nothing like India or Africa, of course, but enough to keep his eye in for leave or retirement.



## CHAPTER XIV

### TICKET OF LEAVE

IT seems incredible, but I am going home on leave. The first feeling of joyous release gives way to melancholy. I have lived alone in the jungle for so long that I shall be out of place at home. I shall be shy and dumb. I shall not understand their sophisticated jargon nor keep pace with their quick repartee. They will vote me a dull dog, and they will be right. Perhaps a girl or two will let me take her out and spend money on her, but she will soon be whisked away from under my nose by some modern youth expert at the latest dances. I shall have lost the art of conversation, and nobody at home wants to hear about the jungle. At my club I shall be a bore, in society a boor. At last I begin to understand the hitherto incomprehensible behaviour of the men who have married their Lao "girls" and settled down for life in the north of Thailand.

No doubt civilisation is terrifying to those who have long been without it. The noise and bustle are appalling after the peace of the forest. Everyone is in a hurry, and no one seems to trust anyone else. It is awful to feel a stranger in your own country. London will seem more inhospitable than Mewong!

I have handed over Chiangmai district to my successor and am going down by river. This will take longer than by road and rail, but there is no hurry. I shall have time to accustom my thoughts to the

great change of life ahead of me. Also, I shall travel in complete peace. And, before seeing the rest of the world, I shall pass through the wildest and most romantic scenery in Thailand. For I am going to explore the famous Meping rapids.

It is the cold weather, and even the navigable portions of the river will be at too low a level for boats. So I have had two bamboo rafts constructed, similar to those on which I did the annual stock-taking of logs in the river, but longer and larger. In my own raft there is room for a deck-chair and a table. The cook and "boys!" raft is full of luggage. Both have semi-circular roofs of thatch. In front and behind each raft is an open platform for the two polemen.

We left Chiangmai one December morning, and glided between the sandbars planted up with tobacco and vegetables. Huge bamboo water-wheels creaked pleasantly beside the high banks. The polemen make no attempt to accelerate our motion. We just drift with the current, and hurry or linger at its caprice. All the polemen have to do is to fend us off the banks or sandbars and keep us in the channel.

At last I have found the ideal form of transport. I am sitting in a long chair, yet moving. There is no noisy engine, no fumes of petrol, no dust, no sweat, no discomfort. I am travelling at any rate as fast as an elephant! And if my craft is primitive, there is the *Empress of Britain* to look forward to. For my plans are to visit Angkor, in French Indo-China, and then join the famous liner on the latter half of her world cruise. She is due in Bangkok next month.

Meanwhile, "peace, perfect peace." Chiangmai is left behind, but we are still winding our way

through its large rice-plain. Villages are frequent, and at some of them a fishing-fence of bamboo stakes has been driven into the sandy bottom right across the river. There are one or two gaps where fishing nets are hung in readiness for the catch, and one opening for boats and rafts, over which we scrape with difficulty. This is but one of dozens of methods of catching fish. Later on we are to see whole fishing camps on the sandbars, with their catches drying in the sun and stinking to heaven!

A water-buffalo lies chewing the cud in the middle of the channel. The shouts and oaths of the foremost poleman fail to disturb the serenity of his reflections, and it is not until the raft is actually bearing down on him, and the poleman crashes his iron-pronged pole on to the broad back that he deigns to move. Then he shuffles out of the water with an expression of the utmost indignation on his absurd face.

It is very cold in the evenings and early mornings. There is actually a fireplace made of dried mud in the front of my raft, and when the "boy" brings me a cup of tea at dawn he lights a fire of small sticks on it. I roll out of my camp-bed, throw a blanket over my shoulders, and sip my tea crouching over the fire. We are tied up to a sandbar, but I can see nothing. A rolling curtain of mist envelops the river. We should have made a start by now if visibility were normal. At last there is an orange glow ahead. The sun is rising almost perceptibly and the mist dissolves. The bow poleman takes his stand on the platform in front of me, the sternsman casts off, and we begin to move. Wisps of mist still cling to the water's surface, and hang over the reeds on the bank. A large blue-and-orange king-

fisher curses us from his perch in an overhanging bamboo clump, startling the silence.

This first stage of the journey is like a dream. We glide past villages with their whitewashed temples and gilded pagodas, past groves of coco-nut trees, then into the forest again between the walls of elephant grass or thickets of dwarf willow. In places the banks are fringed with wild arum lilies, and the air is heavy with their scent. Tall cotton trees are a mass of red flowers, with not a leaf to be seen. In low-lying backwaters the vermilion blooms of the "flame of the forest" stand out against its dark ever-green branches. On the higher banks impenetrable thorny bamboo sometimes bars the way inland for miles.

We have done perhaps a hundred of our three-hundred-mile journey, and small hills begin to appear. One of them, on the left bank, rises from the water in a sandstone cliff about two hundred feet high. It is called "The Lovers' Leap." The story is a sad one, but I am afraid it is true, for it is continued, like a serial, for scores of miles down-river. There is no greater tragedy than happiness frustrated on the brink of consummation.

It must have been somewhere in the twelfth century that a princess of the ruling house of Chiangmai had the misfortune to love and be loved by a commoner. She was a beautiful girl, destined no doubt for a neighbouring throne, and the prospects of union with her loved one were quite hopeless. So they arranged to elope. They got clear away one night, the two of them, mounted on the sturdy, sure-footed little ponies of the country. How and when her disappearance was discovered, or who knew the direction of their flight, is not clear: but

the Chief, her father, and his retinue set out in pursuit before dawn had broken.

His authority, for he was Chao Cheewit, which means Lord of Life and Death, enabled him to commandeer relays of ponies, and early one morning he and his men came up with the lovers on the high river bank just short of the sandstone cliff. The man and the girl knew this was the end. To give themselves up would mean a horrible death for at least one of them, perhaps preceded by torture. So they made one last effort. Spurring their ponies to a gallop, they reached the top of the cliff. Then, smiling into each other's eyes, they swerved their ponies over it, and crashed to death on the rocks below.

The river was in flood, and their bodies were never recovered. But parts of their equipment such as saddles and saddlecloths, and the skeleton of one of the ponies were eventually washed up on the rocks of the various rapids many miles below. And that is why curious names like "Saddlecloth Falls," "Pony's Breastbone" distinguish some of the larger rapids to this day.

In another day we had entered the country of the Meping rapids. For wild grandeur I had seen nothing like it before. Cliffs two thousand feet high, crowned with pines, rose sheer from the water's edge. They were grey and pink and orange, dotted with black where the mouths of inaccessible caves yawned in the sunlight. In places vegetation clung precariously to their face. There were strange, stunted palms such as I had never seen before, spiky bushes and dwarf trees. Then the cliffs would give way to steep hills covered in dense forest as we entered a gorge fringed with rocks amongst which the willow bushes clustered.

I cannot remember in what order they came, but the names of some of the more important rapids, apart from those connected with the story of the princess and her lover, are not unpleasing. There is the sonorous jumble of waters, echoing between high cliffs, known as "The Roaring Elephant." There is another with a large cave in the cliff face at river-level. Through the roof of the cave water trickles down like a natural shower-bath, which gives the rapid the name of "The Houri's Bath." Then there is the rapid with a curious needle-shaped rock overhanging a deep pool at the head of the fall. This is called "The Fishing Rod." Another is named "The Tiger's Foot," and Keng Luang ("Very Big Rapid") is the longest.

It was here that we very nearly met with disaster. All through this hundred-mile stretch of gorges and falls one had noticed the blackened prows and battered timbers of old wrecks protruding from the shingly beaches or wedged behind a rock twenty feet above river-level, grim reminders of the height of flood water and the dangers of midstream rocks. When we reached Keng Luang the polemen tied up the rafts at the head of the falls, and scrambled along the rocky bank to view the channel. As far as I could see there were no less than three channels, all churned up in foam and looking equally impossible. The one they finally decided on looked the worst to me, as it passed at a sharp angle round an immense jagged boulder in midstream.

With encouraging shouts to each other, the polemen pushed off. As we entered the falls we gathered speed to a most alarming extent, and the men were busy jabbing at the rocks on the banks to keep us in mid-channel. Finally we were heading straight for the big boulder. The man in front

poised his pole, then flung its pronged end with all his strength at the rock. The pole broke in two! In less than a couple of seconds we should be piled up on the jagged rock and flung into the foaming river. But, unnoticed by me, he had a reserve pole lying along the deck at his feet. Quick as lightning he had picked it up, shortened his grip, and fended us off the rock just sufficiently not to meet it in a head-on crash. Instead, with a sickening bump which flung me off my deck-chair, we scraped along and past the rock and were soon shot into quiet water. Well done, Ai Nuan!! He shall receive something extra at the end of the voyage!

There was no more trouble, and at last we were clear of actual rapids but still floating down narrow gorges between cliffs or steep hills. It was here that we saw several "serow" (goat-antelope) and "gooral," a kind of mountain chamois. There were also any number of monkeys, from the tailless black gibbon with a white fringe to his face, the handsome long-tailed grey langur, and the common little red-sterned brown monkey. Frequently a tribe of these could be seen traversing the cliff face, and if we passed underneath they would gibber in rage and even throw small stones down on us. Game birds of all kinds were numerous, especially peafowl.

As we neared the end of the gorge country our progress was delayed by a strong wind which blew all day up-stream. It was the hot air of the central rice plains being sucked up into the cool evergreen of the gorges. A pagoda perched on a mountain top proclaimed that we were nearing inhabited country. The river took a sharp turn, and with dramatic suddenness the hills on either bank came to an end, the river trebled its breadth, villages appeared on either side, and that evening we tied up at Raheng.

Next morning I took a "mepah" boat down to Bangkok. I had done three hundred miles on a bamboo raft! The old Burmese head clerk came to the waterside to see me off. As we cast away he salaamed and said, "Depart great Master, and return greater!" It sounded very kind, but what did he mean?



## CHAPTER XV

### MODERN THAILAND

I reach Bangkok to find it more changed than ever. There are not only new streets, new and imposing buildings, more traffic, but the people are changing too. Thailand is in the melting-pot. A wave of nationalism, generated in the fighting services, is sweeping the country. Or perhaps I should say is sweeping Bangkok, for what Bangkok says to-day, the rest of the country will say next year! No other country is so dwarfed and dominated by its capital. Bangkok is the brains as well as the backbone of Thailand. There are whispers of discontent against the privileged classes, and a feeling that, now we are so "civilai", we ought to have a parliament, like other countries.

This is the inevitable result of contact with Western culture due to sending hundreds of students at Government expense to learn their jobs in Europe and America. It is a pity, because the old system worked very well and there was no real oppression. The King was an absolute monarch, and was assisted in the task of government by a cabinet composed almost entirely of Princes of the Blood. They were men of wealth, and therefore the less likely to be corruptible. Many of them had been educated in England, and some were capable and energetic. They got things done, for there was no "debating society" to stand between them and their Ministries.

They may have been a little high-handed, but that is the privilege of Oriental royalty. They were certainly not tyrannical. Here is an amusing instance of the point of view of a prince of the old regime.

A progressive Mayor of Bangkok conceived the idea of numbering the houses for postal convenience in the European fashion. In due course a number appeared in more than one place on the outer walls of old Prince X. 's palace, which occupied half of one of Bangkok's sidestreets. When the aged Prince's attention had been drawn to the matter, he sent for the Mayor. The latter, suspecting nothing, and hoping no doubt for praise or promotion, was ushered into the presence, and prostrated himself with a lively feeling of favours to come.

"Draw nearer," commanded the prince.

The mayor shuffled forward on his knees to within a yard of H.R.H.'s chair. Then the old man leaned forward and gave the civic dignitary a resounding box on the ears.

"Now go and take your blasted numbers off my Palace walls!"

The numbers disappeared that day!

There are still those who hold that education is responsible for most of our troubles. The spread of state education in Thailand had resulted in a large increase of the vernacular Press. Many of the new publications were quite scurrilous. They fomented suspicion of foreign influence and jealousy of the Princes' power and wealth. The officers of the army and navy, not to mention the small but efficient air force, which were the only departments without foreign executives, had been for some time developing a strong nationalistic outlook. Reform and even

revolution were first discussed in their messes. Matters came to a head in June, 1932.

A semi-military Democratic Party suddenly took charge of the Ministries, and demanded a constitution. The Princes were all dismissed, but in a manner typical of Siamese politeness. The whole royal family was declared to be "above politics," and therefore ineligible to hold office! Many of the Princes went into voluntary exile. King Prajadhipok, who himself had some scheme of reform in mind before his hand was forced, granted a constitution. It was decided that, for the present, the National Assembly should be half elected and half nominated by the Government.

As time went on, the new cabinet proved a great disappointment to the progressives. It fell under the influence of certain reactionary members. The new constitution was gradually neglected, while the National Assembly met at longer and longer intervals, and finally ceased to be summoned. Luang Pradit, subsequently Foreign Minister, and one of the leaders of the revolution, was got rid of on pretext of a mission to Europe. (He was described in some of our papers as "Thailand's mystery man!"). Bangkok was seething with discontent and a sense of frustration, especially in military circles.

And so, almost exactly a year after the first, came Thailand's second revolution. The recalcitrant Ministers, going to their offices one morning, found them occupied by soldiery and bristling with machine-guns. The Ministers were strongly advised to go home, and did not hesitate on their course of action. A new cabinet was formed under the premiership of Col. Phya Bahol, destined to hold office for years. After this drastic purge, the

assembly got to work again in earnest on a large programme of reform.

Three months later yet another revolution broke out, of a far more serious kind. It was in fact an armed rebellion led by our old friend Prince Bavaradej who had been, since his Chiangmai days, Minister of War under the old regime. It will be remembered that he was an Old Harrovian, while King Prajadhipok had been at Eton. The defeat of the insurgents was described in a home paper as yet another triumph of Eton over Harrow! Actually the object of Prince Bavaradej's rising was to restore the King to the *status quo* of an absolute monarch.

A battle was fought at Don Muang, Bangkok's airport, some twenty miles north of the capital. The Government forces were victorious. Prince Bavaradej, in the modern Siamese manner, made a graceful exit from the country, not by "harakiri" but by Hawker Fury, or some such speedy 'plane. His more prominent supporters, naval and military officers of the old regime, were captured and condemned to death, but the sentences were commuted. Thus ended Thailand's third revolution in two years, and it is a remarkable tribute to Siamese moderation as well as to the Buddhist religion, which abhors the taking of life, that this was the only occasion where bloodshed occurred.

During these troubles, the Court had moved to a palace in southern Thailand, adjacent to British territory. The King returned to Bangkok, but his position was very difficult. He tried the experiment of a long visit to England, and had a wonderful send-off. But during his absence the assembly deprived him of his last prerogative, the power of vetoing the death sentence, which had saved many

of his loyal but too ardent supporters in the past. In 1935 King Prajadhipok, who had retained his personal popularity through all these crises, decided to abdicate, to the genuine regret of his people. He was succeeded by the next heir, his nephew, a boy of nine at school in Switzerland.

Since then Siamese foreign policy has gone through some remarkable phases. I have already said that the Siamese are an imitative people and are apt to copy the technique of whichever European powers they consider in the ascendant. There is no doubt they have been impressed by the methods of the Dictators. They have even discovered a "Thailand Irrédenta" in the Lao provinces of French Indo-China, and clamoured for the frontiers of 1893. This propaganda, together with a large programme of rearmament, especially in the air, caused the greatest uneasiness in French Indo-China, which is not very strongly garrisoned.

But the rulers of Thailand have always known on which side their bread is buttered. They cannot fail to appreciate the immense value of that little strip of English and French territory that divides them from the miseries of China. Their independence has in the past been guaranteed by England and France, whose territories completely surround them. They may have flirted a little with Japan in recent years, but not to the extent of allowing the Japanese to achieve their cherished project of cutting a canal through the Siamese Isthmus of Kra, which would effectively "by-pass" Singapore, and render our huge expenditure on the naval and air-base there so much money thrown away. Whatever happens, Thailand is determined not to fall under the influence of any other country, but to preserve that independence

implied in her own name for her own country—"Muang Thai," Land of the Free.

Incidentally, the word Siam is the Pali name for the country, and has recently been discarded in favour of "Muang Thai," "Thai," or even "Thai-land!" This is a pity, because the "h" in "Thai" is not pronounced, and merely signifies an aspirated "t" and would be more properly transliterated "ht." I am afraid the vast majority of foreigners will insist on pronouncing "Thai" as "Thigh," whereas one could not go far wrong with Siam!

Thailand maintains her traditional friendship with Great Britain, but our prestige in the Far East has necessarily suffered a little from events in Europe. Now that we have rearmed and are ready to settle our scores with those who have flouted us in the past, we shall have no better well-wisher than Thailand, who shares and understands our passionate love of freedom. May her new rulers steer the ship of state as adroitly as her long line of statesmanlike kings, who preserved her independence through centuries of "smash and grab!"

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Britain, France, Portugal and Holland were all fighting for a major share in the trade of the Far East, the Siamese kings were adepts at the art of playing off one nation against another, keeping friends with all without being dominated by one. In modern times the same technique has been followed. Jobs in the Government services and important contracts have been distributed as impartially as possible among the various nations of the world. I have already mentioned that the Provincial Gendarmerie was officered by Danes. The Bangkok Police, on the other hand, had English officers. The list of Advi-

sers to the various Ministries is illuminating. Foreign Affairs, American: Finance, English: Irrigation, Dutch: Public Health, French: Justice, French and English: Railways (originally) English and German (now Italian and English), and so on throughout the various departments. All these advisers, except Foreign Affairs, Finance and Justice, are gradually being replaced by Siamese. I well remember a cartoon in one of the vernacular papers showing Siamese students returning from education abroad and marked "B. A.," "M. A.," "L.L.D.," etc., etc., while underneath was the caption, "Then why do we go on hiring foreigners?"

As to contracts, the public utility services are mostly in Danish hands. The contract for the first bridge over the Menam was given to the French firm Etablissements Daydé. The second bridge was built by Dorman, Long & Company. There is now a scheme for dredging the bar, and rumour has it that Japan will get the contract. These are typical examples of Thailand's policy of impartiality.

Throughout the Sino-Japanese struggle, Thailand has remained strictly neutral. When Japan was arraigned before the League of Nations, the Siamese delegate refrained from voting. The Premier, Col. Phya Bahol, explained his country's attitude recently by saying:

"The Chinese are our blood-brothers, and we have been friends with Japan for hundreds of years".

That is the key-note of the country—friendliness. From whatever country you come, you will find a welcome in Thailand. Your prejudices will be respected, your religion tolerated and your movements unrestricted. And you for your part will find your hosts smiling, courteous and hospitable, devoid of

cruelty and fanaticism, anxious to learn from you and able to teach you more than you would have suspected. Thailand (and may the balance never be disturbed!) is a happy blend of East and West.



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE HAUNTED CITY

CONTRAST is the spice of life and to have stepped straight off our rickety bamboo raft on to the polished decks of *The Empress of Britain* would have added piquancy to our pleasure. But she is not due for another week, and meanwhile there is a pilgrimage to perform. Few of the original Seven Wonders of the World now survive, as such, and Angkor Wat now claims a place on the list. It would be a major blunder to leave Thailand, in whose territories it was included up to 1907, without a visit to Angkor, especially as it can now be reached in a day from Bangkok. Besides, we are going to be tourists for the next few months, and must accustom ourselves to the rôle.

So as tourists we leave the Hua Lampong terminus one morning in an entirely new direction—due east. As tourists we are pestered at every local station by small boys, who creep along the corridor, peer into our first-class compartment, and beg for “satangs” (cents). No doubt they have reaped rich harvests from American globe-trotters, but at last I tire of them and revert to the resident.

“Be off, you little monkey!”

The small boy scampers away, surprised and indignant. You can never be quite sure with these “farangs.” From the safety of the platform he regains his self-assurance.

"Monkey, indeed! You can't talk like that to a *Siamese*!"

The nationalist spirit again!

The journey had been through a vast rice swamp, where the harvest was being gathered by laughing villagers knee-deep in warm mud. In the afternoon we reach the terminus of the line, the frontier village of Aran Pradet. A Hotchkiss open tourer in charge of a French-speaking Annamite chauffeur awaits us. The Siamese railway is now succeeded by a motor road cutting straight through a dry, grassy plain. The breeze ripples in yellow waves across to the horizon, with scarcely an island of cultivation in sight. For miles we pass no signs of human habitation except the wheeled huts of roadworkers. Patches of scrub begin to appear in the grassland, and near one of them the driver slows down, and pointing away to his right says "Le cerf." It is a thamin, the handsome brow-antlered deer, which in Burma and Thailand is being harried to extinction.

The country becomes more wooded and undulating as we pull up at a provincial customs post. An affable little Frenchman in pink pyjamas comes out of his bungalow and courteously passes us through. It is dusk as we enter a belt of evergreen forest, and dark as we arrive at the Hôtel des Ruines. We have a good dinner, and some amusement is aroused by the resuscitation of my French for the benefit of the Tonkinese "boys". We turn in and sleepily wonder what to-morrow will bring forth.

I am on the hotel verandah at dawn. A morning mist overhangs the broad moat, on which pink lotus can be faintly glimpsed. A flight of teal

splashes noisily down from out of the dim skies. The sun has leapt to life, and begins to dissolve the mist, but wisps of it still cling to the water's surface. And suddenly there loom into view the five central spires of Angkor Wat.

The temples of Karnak, the ruins of ancient Greece and Rome, the stateliest piles of mediæval Europe have paled into insignificance. Spellbound, I watch the triumphant sun gild the grey pinnacles that once blazed with gold-leaf and reveal the majesty and immensity of a masterpiece that the jungle hid for more than three hundred years. Awe is succeeded by a feeling of unutterable melancholy, of the futility that dogs human endeavour, the tragedy that underlies our highest achievement.

I was not entirely unprepared, but what must have been the feelings of the French explorer, Mouhot, who re-discovered the lost city some seventy years ago? I can see him, somewhere near this spot, hacking his way free of the entangling undergrowth and standing agape on the edge of the moat. He had been almost on the verge of collapse. Most of his carriers had deserted, and he was short of food. From the very first the Cambodian villagers had been most unwilling to enter that forest. What did they fear? Fever? He promised them medicines. Crocodiles? Tigers? They should have the protection of his rifle. There was something else. "Pee" (spirits)? Of course, but not the ordinary jungle spirits. He must double, treble, the usual carrier's wage. The forest was haunted. Something had happened, somewhere in its depths—long ago. Their fathers had told them. Something on such a scale that behind every tree in that huge stretch of evergreen there lurked a ghost.

It was an expedition that seemed to be doomed to failure. The midday sun never penetrated that green pall. Fantastic creepers joined the giant branches of the taller trees to the choking vegetation below. But there was no coolness in the perpetual shade. The heat was damp and the air breathless. The birds, if there were any, were silent, and the occasional rustle of a deadly snake in the undergrowth was almost a relief. In such a forest the coolies generally sing to keep up their spirits and scare wild beasts away. But no one dared to pierce the surrounding gloom with the echoes of human voice. By twos and threes the carriers dropped their loads and stole away. Only a handful were left, to fall on their knees in worship as the jungle suddenly ended on the moat's edge, and Angkor was found again! Mouhot had turned a vague legend into a glorious reality.

Angkor Wat is planned on the grand scale. The outer rim of this rectangular moat measures three and a half miles! The broad stone-flagged causeway that crosses the moat to the principal entrance gate, balustraded with the coils of a giant "naga," is a fitting prelude to the wonders within those cloistered walls. One can see religious processions of the past, with gilded elephants and the seven-tiered golden umbrellas of royalty, slowly crossing the causeway to offer up thanks for some triumph in war, or for the birth of an heir to the imperial throne. The blare of trumpets, the beating of tom-toms, punctuated by the silvery notes of a gong, would announce the arrival of the royal retinue, with its attendant archers and horsemen armed with long, plumed spears. These grey walls must have witnessed scenes of pomp and splendour such as only an Asiatic court could provide. They must also have

echoed to the shrieks and groans of the final catastrophe.

Passing through the magnificent entrance gate, we enter the first of three cloistered courtyards, each rising higher and culminating in the central spire above the Holy of Holies. These miles of cloisters are illumined by windows whose carved stone bars filter the glaring sunshine without into a "dim, religious light." Arrived at the third and highest quadrangle, the pilgrim is confronted by an immense flight of almost perpendicular steps, each knee-high, lead up to the central chapel. This is well set back from the top of the steps, so that one has the impression, while ascending, of climbing into the sky. Surely no worshipper at this shrine could arrive at its threshold with any spiritual pride left in him. Instinctively he would prostrate himself before the huge image of the Lord Buddha, which gazes out beyond the temple courtyards into the green horizon of the forest.

The spacious planning is adorned by an amazing beauty of detail. The most delicate tracery alternates with friezes and bas-reliefs as vivid and magnificent as any in the world. The hard grey stone has weathered seven centuries of monsoons and tropic heat, and still the carved legends of Hindu and Buddhist mythology are easily deciphered. No stone is left unpictured, no crevice or cornice unadorned. Yet there is no crowding or redundancy and nothing is out of place. Angkor is a temple of sheer delight, a treasure-house of art, the challenge to posterity of a vanished race.

Out of the cool dim cloisters into the blinding sunshine, we retrace our steps down the flagged causeway, and are at once in the evergreen forest.

Within ten minutes, however we enter a double avenue of gigantic figures supporting two immense serpents each hundreds of feet long. In front stands one of the ruined entrance towers of the Royal City of Angkor Thom. Much of the stonework has crumbled away, yet above every gateway can still be traced the inscrutable features of the Four Faces of Siva, the Hindu god. Facing north, south, east and west, he has guarded every entrance to the city through the centuries, and decay has but added grimness to his gaze.

Within the city walls all is confusion. The ruins of Egypt and of Babylon have been dug out of the sand. The temples and palaces of Angkor Thom have been gradually revealed by the assiduous clearing of the tropical vegetation which is only beginning to relax its suffocating hold. Many a small pagoda is merely held together by the roots of the enormous tree which has grown on top of it. The whole city is a forest, with here and there a clearing where some palace or temple has been hacked out of the green pall which enveloped it. Outside the inner city walls, which form a rectangle eight miles in extent, are other groups of royal and sacred buildings stretching far away into the jungle. The limits of the capital are difficult to define, yet it must have housed at least a million souls. Enough clearing has been done to demonstrate its splendour; and as one wanders along the forest paths that were once the wide paved streets of the metropolis of a mighty empire, one finds at every turn the relics of this remarkable and almost unknown race.

The air is stifling beneath these giant trees, and a sense of mystery and tragedy broods over the ruins. One *knows* the place is haunted. Yet the most exquisite sculptures are everywhere to relieve the

gloom. Carved like lace-work out of a block of stone, I notice, above a dark gateway, a row of small, capering figures. Children or elves, I know not which, they dance hand in hand with such joyous abandon that they are almost alive. Near by, the pediment of a palace is adorned with a bas-relief of elephants marching in solemn procession. Here is the dignity to contrast with the impish antics of the vivid little dancers.

Mile after mile of jungle path, and yet one never tires, for some unexpected shrine looms through the faint dappled sunlight with a new beauty of design or carving to entrance the eye. Still life or scene of vigorous action, nothing was beyond the wit and art of these bygone sculptors. What need of written record when the whole story of the nation is carved in stone?

We can perhaps sense the coming doom, for war is the major theme. This people became great by conquest and were the lords of all south-eastern Asia. "Those who live by the sword shall die by the sword." Look at the carvings on this temple's walls. Here is a battle by land, with the seething infantry marching in the wake of that living "tank" of the ancients, the armoured war-elephant. Here is a naval battle, on the great inland sea which once reached almost to the city walls. Archers are shooting from the top decks, while below toil the miserable galley-slaves of an obviously alien and conquered race. Scenes like these are vividly portrayed by bas-reliefs covering hundreds of square feet. Other walls depict the recreations of the conquerors. Half-naked dancing girls posture before their royal masters. Every phase of the people's life finds expression on the grey stones of Angkor Thom.



"Some unexpected shrine looms through the faint dappled sunlight"





This great city, whose size can only be partly gauged, and the wonderful Wat near by, the nation's masterpiece, are by no means the only memorials of the vanished empire. In whatever direction one penetrates into the surrounding forest, some temple or royal villa, encircled by its artificial lake, will add further tribute to the glorious past. Some ruins are as much as twenty or thirty miles away from the centre of the city. The extant remains are only those of temples or palaces of the great, public buildings or courts of law. What an area was covered by the bamboo and thatch dwellings of the common people can only be faintly imagined. The teeming suburbs of this imperial city must have stretched for leagues beyond its walls.

What do we know of the nation which built Angkor? Discounting the legends which distort Oriental history, all is plain sailing up to a point. The ancient Khmers, or Cambodians, came into prominence as a nation about A.D. 500. For the next thousand years their power and prestige rose steadily. We know the names of their great kings, and much interesting detail about the magnificence of their Court is preserved in the reports of an ambassador from the Emperor of China. It is said that one of their kings was a leper, and the site of his palace is pointed out to this day. The Khmer Empire must have included all the neighbouring countries from Java to Bengal. The achievement of the nation in war, in peace, and in the arts were such that it is difficult to believe that the modern Cambodians, a poor and apathetic people, are their descendants.

At the height of its glory, Angkor must have been a marvellous city. With a population as large as that of present-day Calcutta, with a profusion of palaces and temples, and the most wonderful shrine

in the world to attract pilgrims from all over the East, its streets were filled with a cosmopolitan crowd. The tens of thousands of slaves captured in war could be seen performing all the menial tasks, while the proud Khmers pass by in their golden palanquins on their way to the great bazaars or to some royal reception. All the luxury of the gorgeous East, all the pomp and ceremony of an imperial court, the plays, the dancing, the huge festivals, were part of the daily life of these fortunate people. Then, like lightning out of a cloudless sky, destruction overwhelmed them.

They vanished from history somewhere about A.D. 1500. It is only some seventy years ago that Angkor was rediscovered by the intrepid Mouhot. All the evidence suggests a sudden catastrophe, but mystery surrounds the fall of the Khmer Empire. The theory of invasion from without, perhaps by the rough progenitors of the modern Siamese, finds a certain amount of support. Enervated by luxury, guarded by an army of alien mercenaries, they may have been wiped out by a horde of vigorous hillmen intent on plunder. But in that case why did not the barbarians raze Angkor Wat to the ground? Such was the custom of Eastern warfare—did the Burmese spare Ayuthia, or the Siamese Pegu? The city of Angkor Thom seems to have been destroyed by the jungle rather than by human agency. The relentless growth of its sinister vegetation, especially the snaky roots of the giant fromager, can force stone from stone and gradually bring down a whole edifice. The condition of Angkor Wat, though perhaps saved by its moat, and of some of the major places in the city point to a wholesale desertion rather than to the destruction of war.

The theory of an internal massacre is more promising. Goaded beyond endurance by the

cruelty and arrogance of their masters, the myriads of slaves who must have been necessary to build the huge city and its mighty temple—for in this part of the world men do not work unless compelled by force or hunger—may have risen in a night, obtained possession of the city, and killed every soul within it. Perhaps they then fled from the haunted scenes of their orgy of blood, the shedding of which it is abhorrent to Buddhists, away into the surrounding forests, and relapsed into barbarism. The modern Cambodians certainly seem more like the descendants of a race of slaves than heirs to one of the greatest civilisations of mediæval Asia.

The soil and water of the tropics are notorious for the breeding of disease. The theory of a terrible pestilence, some tropical Black Death that in a few short weeks killed off the whole population is by no means without credibility. The overcrowding and lack of sanitation in a huge Eastern city would provide the most favourable conditions for an outbreak of cholera. Or the stagnant pools in the surrounding evergreen forest would be an ideal breeding-ground for the type of mosquito which produces malignant malaria. These pests would soon spread to the artificial lakes which embellish so many of the temples and palaces. In recent years we have seen what toll malaria can take in Ceylon, even when opposed by the skill and knowledge of modern science. The Asiatic has little resistance to malignant disease.

Whether from plague or massacre, the end of this mighty people was dreadful and swift. Their history ends suddenly—in silence. We can imagine the last scene. High up in the sky appear a few specks, circling round and round. The scouts of death are soon swelled to massed battalions: a black

cloud of hideous vultures swoops down on the stricken city. At night jackals and wild beasts from the jungle steal in to get their share. A few weeks of horrors unspeakable, and then the green waves of the forest surge in, mercifully to hide for hundreds of years the scenes of tragedy and doom.

The gilding has gone from their pinnacles, but the five central spires of Angkor Wat still stand as witnesses to the glory of a nation that is dead. High up in the inmost shrine the Lord Buddha gazes out to the green horizon. He knows the secrets of greatness and the causes of decay.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE REST OF THE WORLD

THE *Empress of Britain* lies at anchor outside the bar. We Bangkok passengers wait at the terminus of the little Paknam Railway which runs down the riverside to Mosquito Point. Two special trains are conveying our future fellow-passengers up to "do" Bangkok. At last the first train pulls in.

"Maa (mother)!" exclaims a Siamese on the platform, "I have never seen so many foreigners together before."

They certainly are an amazing crowd. It is difficult for a tourist not to look like a tourist, and even more difficult for Americans, who formed the majority. The result in appearance was anything from a stage missionary (female) to a Palm Beach Big Boss (male). It was during the Prohibition Era, and I was much interested to pick out successful gangsters touring the world on a slight percentage of their profits. There was one I felt sure of. He was white-haired, and might have been sixty, but his dark eyes were burning with youth and greed and lust.

At last they had all detrained, and we few were free to take our seats in the empty train. Half-way down the line we pulled up at a station to let another trainload of them pass. They already looked hot and uncomfortable, but nothing to what they would soon

feel with their big programme of sightseeing in the heat of a Bangkok afternoon. And some of them had not even got topees!

The luxury of the *Empress of Britain* was almost overwhelming after years of the jungle. It was London, Paris and New York rolled into one. There was a full-size tennis court on the top deck, out-of-doors and indoors swimming pools, a squash racquets court, a gymnasium, and miles of spacious lounges and deck promenades. At the cocktail bar before dinner famous beauties would foregather with men whose names were known over half the world. Everyone was friendly, except that one or two Americans (I think they were "horsey" people from Kentucky) would not deign to mix with any of their compatriots.

Manila was our first port of call. Hardly had the ship docked than I noticed one of our American passengers make a bee-line for a couple of Filipino youths. I could not help overhearing the beginning of a long conversation.

"Now, why don't you fellows like being ruled by us?" he asked. "Why do you want us to quit?"

I did not hear their reply!

Manila is a combination of an old Spanish and a modern American business town. The Filipinos are a Malay race, but unwarlike, and their complete independence would probably result in their extermination by the savage hilltribes of the interior. The American administration is benevolent, but one felt in Manila that there was an atmosphere of "graft."

We left Manila just as the moon was rising. I shall never forget that moon. It was green, a lovely shade of light green not unlike the colour of young

rice. Romance was restored as we steamed into the South China Sea bound for Hong Kong.

This hilly little island is one of the most cheerful places in the world. The Chinese are happy, the Services are happy, the merchants are happy, everyone is happy. I am taken out to a race-meeting at Fanling, on the mainland, where the most astonishing feats of riding seem to get a quite unnatural pace out of the thick-set, flat-eared Mongolian ponies. I am told to follow the mounts of a gunner subaltern, who is evidently the local Gordon Richards, and do so to my profit. In one race he looked like finishing last, but literally pushed his sluggish brute to victory.

At Fanling, too, is a wonderful thirty-six-hole golf course nearly on the Chinese border. We go and return by a little local train which obligingly waits for us as rickshaws are seen tearing round the corner of the station road. Then we reach Kowloon station and are ferried across to the island. When we left Hong Kong a gallant airman circled round the *Empress* and dropped a bouquet on the bridge. To it was tied a card inscribed with the name of a famous beauty on board !

As we travel north up the China coast it gets colder and colder. Finally we anchor off Ching-wantao, near Tientsin. The sea is a mass of green ice. We shiver as we descend into the tender and are taken to the quay, where a luxurious train awaits us. There is a Japanese warship anchored still farther out, and Japanese sentries with fixed bayonets patrol the station platform. But at Tienstin station we are cheered by the sight of British "Tommies."

The journey up to Peking passes through the most inhospitable country. It is flat, and under snow,



and there are no trees. Even down in Hong Kong we had noticed Chinese women collecting dry reeds for firewood. Here there is nothing to break the monotony of the landscape but a few raised graves. China's huge population seems, through the centuries, to have deforested the country. And so, long before we have reached it, the walls of Peking loom large in the distance.

Balbus was the first wall-builder I remember, but he was a novice compared to the mediæval Chinese. These city walls are as high as an average house and thick enough for wheeled traffic. There are walls within walls, and city within city, and the train, tunnelling through yet another wall, draws up at the station of the Legation Quarter, which itself is a walled city.

The contrast from the bitter cold outside to the central heating of the Hôtel des Wagons-Lits is almost painful. The hotel residents try to look haughty as we tourists troop into dinner. But we are so sleepy after a long day that we don't really mind!

Next day we struggle into furs, overcoats and rickshaws. Why we should choose this coldest form of transport is solely because we feel it is the thing to do. Next day we are unanimous in taking cars! An icy wind whistles down the street, raising clouds of septic dust. In the Japanese Legation districts they are all wearing cotton pads over nose and mouth. Everything is strange in this amazing city. We pass trains of shaggy Bactrian camels and see a man driving a herd of black, *woolly* pigs! We pass through huge gateways with guard-rooms on their top, and arrive at the Lama temple.

This is very much like a Siamese temple, except that the acolytes, in addition to their yellow robes,

wear a high hat of red velvet not unlike that worn by our own Punch. But the Temple of Heaven is quite different. The grounds are spacious, and it stands on the top of a mound which the old Chinese claimed to be the very centre of the universe. The temple is simple, and yet magnificent, and the blue of the glazed tiles of the high roof is literally a heavenly blue.

It is a long way out to the Summer Palace but it is well worth while. It is almost a city in miniature, partly by the lakeside, and partly built on a hill. The lake is almost entirely frozen over, except for some open water in the middle where wild swans and wild duck are resting. On the shore is a landing pavilion, by the side of which lies a barge of marble. The Camel Bridge, so called from its shape, spans one of the lake's outlets. As we wander through the empty halls of the palace there is a feeling of sadness at the departed grandeur of the court of a woman who divided with another woman, our Queen Victoria, the sovereignty of the vast majority of mankind. There is a room full of curious European clocks. We are shown the Dowager Empress's sleeping apartments. There is another curiosity. Even the commodes are lined with silk cushions!

Through the mazes of the vast city, with its Tartar and Forbidden City, we gradually find our way to the shops we want, which are all in their appropriate streets. There is Silk Street, Jewel Street and the like. In the Legation Quarter we see the crack American Marines at drill. And one night, as I walk up to the other hotel, the Grand, to see some friends, I pass the Japanese Legation. The little sentry drops his bayonet to the ready, and keeps it pointed at me till I am past his beat! I am muffled in a Mongolian fur cap, and he cannot tell my nationality. But he is taking no chances!

Last wonder of this vast country, the Great Wall of China. You can imagine it being built to the orders of an absolute monarch under instructions to follow the line, no matter what the country is like. And so it continues, up hill and down dale, crossing valleys, climbing hills four thousand feet high, with turrets and bastions every few hundred yards, thirty feet high, and broad enough on top for a motor road. Here are pedlars selling the points of flint arrows picked out of the walls, relics of attack by the Mongol hordes. We climb to a height and watch the wall stretching out into either distance, fading out of sight on the hills of the horizon, monument to a civilisation which flourished while our ancestors were daubed with woad!

And so on to Japan, a country so industrialised that you can hardly see the sky for the overhead wires bringing electric power to every corner of the land. Yokohama and Tokyo are almost one. It is as if Birmingham and the Midlands were joined up with London. In the main station, local electric trains buzz in and out as numerously as at Waterloo. Thank God there is an escape up to a little mountain town where the red-cheeked school-children in their woolly clothes are as friendly as village children at home.

There is a war on, and troop-trains rush through the local stations packed with women and children cheering and waving flags. And so back to Tokyo and the earth-quake-proof Imperial Hotel. Built of some porous-looking stone, massive pillars support the low roofs of the rooms and corridors, yet the whole effect is pleasing.

It is an incongruous, artificial country. The oldest temples look new-fangled compared to those of India and China. It seems all wrong that Orientals

should live in a whirl of ultra-civilised hustle. The mixture of Eastern and Western dress does not conduce to the dignity of either. The men, particularly the coolie class, look "tough". But there is something very fascinating about the women.

There is romance in the name of Honolulu. There is romance in the name of the Hawaiian Islands. But it has all been "canned," and is served up on ice to tourists and visitors. The place is a suburb of Hollywood. It is paradise developed by experts in "real estate." You can visit a bronze islander sitting in his home-made grass hut. But at night he sleeps at the Y.M.C.A.!

But it is captious to complain. As we walk down to the beach from the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, whose prices make the Ritz seem a doss-house, the thermometer reads "Air temperature 76, sea 75!" Under an umbrella on the beach sit two famous film beauties, and in a semicircle round them, naked but for a loin-cloth, handsome Hawaiian surf-boys strum love-songs on their guitars. These islanders are musical and, unlike most Eastern races, have adopted Western music as their own. And the surf-riding of Waikiki beach is glorious. The expert can ride the Pacific breakers standing upright for two hundred thrilling yards. There are surf canoes for the less venturesome.

In the evening we meet the "hula hula" girls. They are young and golden and beautiful, and their thighs gleam through their straw skirts as their hips shiver in suggestive mime. Their hair and busts are garlanded with perfumed flowers. But their performance is broadcast, and a slick American "compère" says, "Thank you gurrils." Few of them are pure Hawaiians, and some of them are nearly

white. But there is a captivating air of innocence in their indelicate dances, and they are certainly "easy on the eye."

As we leave the quay at sunset, we lean over the side to wave farewell. We are mostly garlanded, and innumerable streamers connect us to hands on shore. The commercial prostitution of a Pacific Garden of Eden, the vulgarity that seems to dog America's footsteps in the East, are all forgotten as the voices of the islanders on the quay swell into the chorus of "Aloha hey," the most beautiful and poignant farewell song in the world. Slowly we steam out with its echoes in our ears. The coloured streamers are all broken.

Through the Golden Gate and into the towering, romantic city of San Francisco. The evening gives us a first glimpse of how street and sign lighting can transform a commercial centre into fairyland. And next morning we learn that there are two Californias.

We have gone to a travel agency and asked for information about southern California. But a grave, well-educated young man in glasses assures us that English folk would find the people down there "shallow and artificial." Few of them have even been settled there for a generation! So we visit Del Monte, lose golf balls in the "Ocean," never the "sea," at Pebble Beach, and stay in the little artists' colony of Carmel-by-the-Sea.

But the lure of Hollywood cannot be resisted. The size of Los Angeles is stupefying. We penetrate to its centre, and take precarious (at the ruling rate of exchange) refuge in The Biltmore. Our hotel is thus referred to by a comedian in the local music-hall.

"My girl asked me to take her out to lunch in the car. I asked her where she would like to lunch, and she said The Biltmore. So I sold the car——"!!

At the same performance, two back-chat artists referred to England. It was in the days of prohibition.

"England," said one of them. "You know, that little island due east of the Statue of Liberty. They've got the liberty and we've got the statue"!!

Out at Hollywood is another and even more magnificent hotel, The Ambassadors. The crowds can wander through its shops on the ground floor, and over the spacious grounds, but there is a special lawn "reserved for hotel residents." There they sit, mostly old folk, but childishly selfconscious and thoroughly enjoying the stares of the curious. As a man at Carmel had told me, there is nothing an American enjoys more than a sense of privilege.

I am asked out to Beverly Hills for tea and tennis. We are just sitting down to tea when someone appears in the garden. Our hostess excuses herself and goes out, returning ahead of the new-comer with a whispered warning to take no notice of her. Through the French windows walks a woman in polo jumper and white shorts. A cap conceals her hair and glare-glasses her eyes. But nothing can conceal her nobility, though I have no idea who she is. She is very shy, but our hostess is tactful. At last she is chatting at her ease, and is introduced as Miss Garbo. We talk for a while, and after she is gone I realise that I have been privileged, for she leads a quiet life, cultivates a few friends and does not mix in the gaiety of Hollywood "society." Our hostess happened to be one of her intimate friends.

Lunching at the "Brown Derby" (which you must on no account pronounce "Darby") we notice Wallace Beery thoroughly enjoying his meal at a neighbouring table. Then we are shown round the M. G. M. "sets," and pass Clark Gable and many other celebrities on our way round the maze of mediæval fortress towns, French cities, corners of old London and "Main Streets" of the Middle West. Illuminating all is the bright sunshine of California, whose value per unit of light must be fantastic!

Down to San Diego, through El Paso, and we reach New Orleans, whose banana groves remind us of the East. This is such a sleepy old city one cannot believe it is American. There is something awe-inspiring about the vast Mississippi imprisoned between its artificial banks.

We meet no gangsters in Chicago. The backtown is too busy and the Lakeside quarter too respectable, it seems to us, to harbour such improbable people. Our hotel is a skyscraper with a thousand rooms. I am taken to a local sports club by one of the young Harvard boys I befriended in Paknampo! The other awaits me in New York!

Washington is planned on the grand scale, and the atmosphere is somehow English. In the House of Representatives we listen to a volatile speech by Congressman La Guardia, now Mayor of New York. But even his eloquence is cut short by the chairman's inexorable hammer. The Senate is more than half empty, and names are read and re-read with few responses. Quiet messengers go in search of the absent legislators, but we cannot wait. In the evening we go to the theatre, where, most appropriately, a well-known English touring company plays to a packed and appreciative house.

We are lucky in our approach to New York. Our train from Washington as passed through what might have been an English countryside, and we are ferried across the Hudson. We thus have a unique view of the famous sky-line, which somehow is beautiful and not crudely overpowering. The city is vast but friendly, and Park Avenue reminds us as much of London's West End as down-town and Times Square of the city. Our Harvard friend insists on taking us to a residential suburb somewhere in the East Forties. We go down to a basement entrance, and knock at the door. We are inspected through a sliding panel, my friend is recognised, and we are welcomed in to a quiet bar, over which is framed a ten-dollar note. It is the first payment received by this respectable "speak-easy," and will bring luck!

After a dry Martini we depart. Outside another private house in the same street is a notice: "These premises have been closed for contravention of the Volstead Act." One escapes, and the other carries on! Was it carelessness or stinginess that ended a lucrative business, we wonder.

At night we are taken to see the lights of Broadway. Its daytime aspect is quite unrecognisable. It has been transformed into a scene in a pantomime. Then down to the White Star wharf. We invite our Harvard boy and his two friends to have a drink. But, of course (how silly of us!), it is impossible until we are outside the seven-mile limit.

"That's all right," says our friend. "You have some with us." And each produces a flask of good whisky from the hip pocket!

"It's such a farce," he continues. "We boys were supposed to grow up without knowing what



liquor is. But the first thing to do in entering college is to contact with a good bootlegger!"

A lady on the *Empress* told me she got it through her bank, which is a very well-known one!

And so American hospitality pursues us to the last. We have known enough of this people in six weeks to make us firm friends of a great-hearted, liberty-loving, virile nation for the rest of our lives. The atmosphere of the States is a perpetual sea-breeze.

The siren sounds for guests to leave for the shore.

"One last toast," says the Harvard boy.

Here's to both our countries, and may they always work together."

